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OR,
The Mystery of Madeline Miggs.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSPUR," "SUNSHINE SAM,"
"SOL SPHINX," "DUDE DESPERADO,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MIGGS.

"COLD night. Snow! Some one will freeze,
But it won't be Epsom Tibbets, no! no! ha! ha!"

Mr. Epsom Tibbets, the speaker, was at home in his cozy office five minutes' walk from Union Square, and the chances were that the inference of his speech was the correct thing, for, with that cheery fire in the grate the biting wind would have to whistle hard and long to reach him.

He was a man heard of beyond the street in which he did business, and those who had occasion to visit him knew that he was a person of few words and those of the shortest kind. He

seldom used words of more than three syllables and what he did use were as expressive as he could make them. Besides this, he snapped off his sentences as if angry at them, and sometimes would strike the table with his fist to emphasize his brief homilies.

On this particular night the wind was whistling through the great city between the rivers, and Epsom Tibbets, broker and money shark, was alone in his little room waiting for a victim as he had so often—so very often done before.

He was the spider who caught the many flies; they came at all hours and he did them up with a smile that seemed to transform him into a seraph.

It was just ten o'clock as the timepieces of the city said when a footstep came up the steps that led to Mr. Tibbets's office.

The old man hastily saw that his coat was buttoned as usual to his chin, then he rubbed his hands and began to watch the door like a hawk.

"Come in," he called out, and the door opened to admit, not a man, as he evidently expected, but a woman whose face was veiled.

Her figure was tall, and, from what the broker could see, graceful in the extreme.

She carried in her hand the small black hand-sachet affected by women, and when she took the wicker chair which stood on the opposite side of the table at which Tibbets sat, instead of relinquishing her hold on the bag, she seemed to grip it with renewed firmness.

When she raised her veil the man leaned across the table and with a slight start looked into his visitor's face.

It was not a handsome face, for it was dark, and showed that the owner had seen hard times and seasons of care or trouble.

Still, it was a face which, once seen, was not soon to be forgotten; but the oddest thing was that Epsom Tibbets said to himself that he knew this woman.

If he did she did not seem to recognize him, for she looked at him a full moment before she spoke.

"You are Mr. Tibbets, I believe?"

"Epsom Tibbets. Been here a long time. Broker. Guess I'm the man you want to see."

She seemed to smile at his curtness, but made no comment upon it.

"I want a little accommodation," she said at last. "In fact, I am a little short of funds, and, having been recommended to you, I thought I would call at this hour as more apt to find you disengaged."

"Yes; always ready for business. Don't have to wait long. First come first served—last come served as well."

The woman bent over the table and unclasped the hand-bag.

As she ran her hand into it the keen eyes of Tibbets saw what he afterward recalled—that one of the fingers were a peculiar gold ring. From this bag she drew a packet.

From the moment of the opening of the sachet, he nearly forgot the letter he had just finished and stamped as the woman came up his stair. Now he picked it up.

"Got a letter here. Ought to be posted," he announced sharply.

"Wait! We can transact our business in a few minutes. I want five hundred dollars."

"What security?"

"The contents of this package."

She opened the packet taken from the sachet and Tibbets caught the glitter of diamonds.

There was a strand of them and all superb gems.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "Sparklers! Going to leave them with me! People die sometimes."

"Just so," answered the woman. "I'll risk that. Here is the security."

"Five hundred?" and as he spoke the broker ventured to take the jewels.

They were beauties and must have been worth many times five hundred, though Tibbets was not much of a judge of diamonds.

He did not seem to question their genuineness, but fingered them with admiration and at last reluctantly let them go.

"You don't seem to know me," he said to himself. "You come here in disguise, but, the more I look at you the surer I am that I know you. You are playing some sort of game. Didn't know you were so near. But no matter; you have the sparklers and you are going to let me keep 'em."

He turned his chair round and leaned toward a safe that stood in one corner of the little office.

"Big bills?" he asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Suit yourself." Tibbets counted out the money and when he rose again caught sight of the letter which he had left lying on the table.

"This must go to the box right off. Will be back in a minute," he said, thrusting the bills into his pocket and at the same time shutting the safe.

As he stood up his visitor seemed to have a shock of some kind for she fell back in her chair and stared at him as if for the first time she had seen something familiar about the money shark.

"I know you," she said with a smile.

"Just so. You've been missing a long time."

"I didn't know it was you," she went on. "I had no idea that Epsom Tibbets was—"

"You hadn't, eh? Queer. Not so queer either, come to think of it. We used to know one another, but haven't met for some years. How have you been?"

She seemed to shiver.

"We'll talk when you come back if that letter must go to the box right away."

"It must. Snowing when you came up, eh?"

"Only spitting a little."

"Like a kitten when you worry it, eh?" and Tibbets left his guest alone in the office to await his return.

He found no one on the street whom he knew. The air was crisp and airy snow crystals touched his face.

"Queer," he muttered. "Queer that she should turn up in this town. With diamonds, too! She of all women! Looks pretty tired, too. Must have had a time of it since we met. They're worth many times the amount I'm letting her have."

Reaching the letter-box he drooped into it his letter, then turned back, but caught sight of the red light of a little grogery near the corner.

"Why not? Am making a good pile to-night, for something tells me that those diamonds will never be redeemed. Guess I will."

Tibbets was not a frequenter of saloons, but he sometimes went in to take a silent drink "in memory of old times," as he said, whatever the phrase meant, and this time he thought he could afford the luxury.

In the saloon, which was small, he came in contact with a man whom he thought he knew.

A second look, however, told him that he was mistaken—that he was a stranger whom he was on the point of asking up to the cramped bar.

Tibbets was asked about the night outside by the barkeeper who seemed on terms with him, and instead of going directly back to the woman in his office, he stood at the counter and told how the weather was that night a year ago, which he was enabled to do, thanks to an excellent memory.

Not more than ten minutes had elapsed since quitting the office, when Mr. Tibbets turned back to duty.

"Very queer that we should meet," he said to himself as he went along the street. "Would like to know what she's been doing and why she's here. Will ask her. Must make a mental note of that or it'll slip my mind."

"I say, stranger, would you direct me to G—street?" said a voice, at sound of which the broker turned, to be approached by a man not so tall as he, nor so slim. He wore a close-fitting coat which was buttoned to his chin, and his hat was pulled down over his eyes as if to shade them from the light and protect them from the wind.

"G— street, eh? Yes. To your right, yonder, round the first corner." And the skeleton-like finger pointed to the corner designated.

"Is that G— street?" the man queried.

"Was yesterday. Guess they haven't changed its name."

"Which way does it run?"

Tibbets, just a little impatient, looked in amazement at the questioner.

"Streets don't run," he said. "They are stationary. That's G— street. Business. Good-night." And the money-lender resumed his journey back to his little office.

He hastened up the stairs, exclaiming as he entered the room:

"Back! Not snowing now. Heavens!"

He was fairly in the room, and was staring at the sight which met his gaze.

The woman was still there, but was lying on the floor at the foot of her chair.

It seemed to Tibbets that she had fallen from the chair in a fit of some kind, but when he sprung forward and looked down into the face which was turned up to the gas-jet over the table, he felt the strangest thrill he had felt for years.

"Great heavens! Miggs is dead!" he cried.

Miggs!

That, then, was the name by which he knew his visitor. That was the name by which she was destined to go down into detective history, for another mystery of the great metropolis was lying at the feet of Mr. Epsom Tibbets.

He stood for a moment, unnerved, over the woman on the floor.

"Must pick her up," he said. "Won't do to have a dead woman on my floor."

He lifted the form and was about to place it in the chair from which it had fallen when he discovered that blood was running over the dress and the body almost slid from his grasp.

"Murdered! Miggs killed! Wonder if they got the diamonds?"

He looked up, but the hand-sachet was gone, and when he had placed the body in the chair he looked everywhere for the jewels.

"Never heard of any thing like this. Gone five minutes, woman killed in my office. Here's something for the sharps. Now the wonder-shadow round the corner will have a job."

He stepped back and for some time stood

looking at the lifeless woman whose face shone ghastly in the light that fell upon it; then, as if realizing his situation, he went to the chair and bent over the body.

"If it wasn't in my office I wouldn't get into the papers. Don't want to see my name there. It would hurt my business. Epsom Tibbets, it would have been a good thing if Miggs had been killed elsewhere."

His hand fell suddenly upon the shoulder of the dead.

"Confound you, Miggs! why didn't you go to some other man for the five hundred?" he hissed.

CHAPTER II.

"THE WONDER-SHARP ROUND THE CORNER."

THE man called by Epsom Tibbets "the wonder-shadow round the corner," was a noted person.

In years he was just thirty-six, but he had seen enough of the dark side of life to make him ten years older.

Dan Damon, or Gilt-Edge Dan, was a detective and his little room was situated round the corner from Tibbets's abode, up two flights and at the end of the hall.

It was just half an hour after the events we have narrated that feet went down that corridor and stopped in front of the ferret's door.

The gas burning in the hall revealed the closely-buttoned form of Epsom Tibbets, and when the broker stopped at that particular door, he seemed ready to go back and leave his startling information for others.

But at last as he heard a movement in the detective's room, he caught hold of the knob and opened the door.

The man he sought sat at a small desk with his back half turned toward the entrance, and when Tibbets crossed the threshold the keen eyes that glittered in the coolest of heads seemed to twinkle.

It was the first time Mr. Tibbets had ever entered that place.

"I want you. Got a case. Woman dead in my office," said Tibbets halting near the ferret whose look was riveted upon him and from whose eyes came a strange scrutiny that almost made the broker wince.

"In your office? Who is she?"

"Miggs."

"Who's Miggs?"

"Can't tell you much about her. Haven't seen her for years. She's been murdered."

In another moment Gilt-Edge Dan was on his feet and looking for his hat.

"When did this happen?" he asked as he found that article.

"Little while ago. I wasn't present; was posting a letter. Found her dead when I came back."

The two left the room together and in a short time the detective entered the broker's den and stood over the body of the woman in the chair.

"That's her; that's Miggs—Madeline Miggs," said Tibbets. "She's dead yet, eh?"

Dan Damon said nothing, but fell to examining the dead woman, and Tibbets, drawing off, watched him in silence.

"She's been daggered," said the detective, looking up.

"Eh? Daggered? Really, I didn't look."

The ferret continued his superficial examination and suddenly turned on Tibbets.

"What did she want?" he asked.

"What do the most of them want who come here?"

"Money."

"Miggs was no exception. She wanted money—five hundred. Offered jewels for security."

"Did she have them with her?"

"Of course. Carried 'em in a hand sachet."

"Which has vanished with the sparklers?"

"Just so. It went off with the person that killed Miggs."

The detective's face seemed to light up with a smile.

"Madeline Miggs, you say? You knew her?"

"Long time ago. Didn't know she was in the city till she opened that door and raised her veil."

"Who was she?"

"Miggs."

"Is that all you know?"

"All."

"But she knew you—"

"Not right away. I recognized her first and she didn't seem to remember me till near the end of the interview. Must I get into the papers?"

"I don't see how you can keep out of them," returned Dan. "It won't hurt you."

"Don't know," and Tibbets dolorously shook his head. "People are superstitious. Don't like to cross a step where blood has been spilled. I would have made it interesting for Miggs if she had died elsewhere."

"She couldn't choose, maybe," smiled Gilt-Edge Dan.

"Maybe not. Well, I don't want her here. Another job might come, you see."

One hour later the body of the murdered woman occupied a room different in every way from the one in which the fatal blow had fallen.

As is usual in such cases, the inquisitive reporter came to view the corpse, but Tibbets, with a care for his business as he remarked to the

police, declined to be interviewed, and the pencil-shavers found themselves confronted by a man who stubbornly refused to give them a spark of information.

"Won't talk till I have to. Don't know who killed Miggs. Wish she had died elsewhere," was all they got out of Tibbets.

Gilt-Edge Dan went down the street, his eyes fastened reflectively on the snow-covered stones.

When he opened the door he found, huddled close to the fire he had left, a little girl, who looked up at him with a strange smile on a wan but beautiful face.

"So you came in, Clova?" he said, approaching the child, and then taking a chair near her. "You knew how to get in, I see?"

"Yes, you told me how, you know," answered the little one in sweet tones. "I couldn't help coming, though the hour is late. It is cold in the rookery, but I'll go back to aunt when I get the warmth of your fire all through me."

Gilt-Edge Dan ran his fingers through the long, uncombed locks of the girl, as they shone in the cheery blaze of his fire, and thought how months before he had met her on the street to learn that she inhabited a rat-trap called "The Rookery," and that she was the niece of a woman called Velma, who lived in the best part of the old building, and who sometimes picked up a few dollars braiding the hair of the rich belles on the avenue.

As little Clova looked into the fire she was watched by the detective, who seemed to have forgotten the mystery of Tibbets's office in contemplating her.

Suddenly he said:

"There's been a murder, Clova."

The girl knew his calling and slowly she turned upon him her great brown eyes, till they seemed to regard him with something akin to a shudder.

"Have you just come from there?" she asked.

"Yes. It happened nearer than you think."

"Not in The Rookery, I hope?"

"No, in Epsom Tibbets's office."

"Epsom Tibbets?"

Clova repeated the name as if she had heard it before. It came over her lips in a peculiar manner, and the ferret saw that her hands shut hard as she spoke.

"Do you mean the man who buttons his coat to the chin, and shoots out his words like fire-crackers from a toy cannon?"

"Yes, the same."

"Who was killed in his office?" and before Dan could answer her she continued: "I don't see who would want to be killed there, do you, Captain Dan?"

Again the detective smiled at the quaint conceit of the child.

"Maybe she couldn't choose her place—"

"What, was it a woman killed there? And will they hang the buttoned-coated man?"

"I don't know who they will hang; but it will be somebody."

She looked up into his face and was silent for a time.

"Why did they do it, Captain Dan?" she asked.

"That's to be found out."

"And are you going to find out?"

"I am. I shall go to the bottom of this mystery. I will find out who killed Madeline Miggs."

"What a queer name!" observed Clova. "Madeline Miggs; and they killed her. What for?"

"All that will be known in time. It was a cold-blooded crime, Clova; but, crime blunders, and I think this one isn't an exception."

"I guess I'll go back now."

Dan rose with the little girl, who was not more than thirteen, and told her that he would see her back to The Rookery.

They went out together, the hand of Clova in the detective's palm, and the man of trails looking down into the beautiful face with feelings of real affection.

Dan Damon escorted his little charge to the door of the tall building and kissed her good-night ere she sprung back and vanished in the shadows of the trap.

Then he turned and was going home again when he was stopped by a man, who came suddenly out of the shadows of a house and touched him.

"By Jove! another one!" this man said, his eyes glittering in the light of the lamp.

Gilt-Edge Dan looked at him a full minute before he spoke.

"How do you know, Boston?" he queried at last.

"Don't I catch onto a good many things that puzzle the boys? Don't I know that a woman was found dead—murdered—in old Tibbets's office? And Tibbets refuses to talk."

The speaker was a singular-looking specimen of humanity. One eye was gone, and the socket had healed over in a manner which seemed to tell that no eye had ever gleamed here. Then, in addition to this, he had one low shoulder which was a noticeable deformity, and his body was shrunken and slim, as if he had been through some wreck, to come out of it with his manly beauty gone.

Gilt-Edge Dan looked at this man a moment and then told him to "come on."

Boston Billkins, as he was called, seemed to hail the light and warmth of the ferret's fire with a feeling of exquisite pleasure.

"Her name was Miggs. That's all they can get out of Tibbets at present," he said, looking at Dan who stood near him.

"Yes, he says that much."

"But he knows more, eh?"

"I think so, Boston."

"So do I. Sly old fox, that Tibbets. Has had many ups and downs in this world and hopes he won't fare so badly in the next. She went to him for money—all do who climb his steps. He calls her Miggs—shoots the words out of his mouth like bullets. Now look here."

Bilkins lifted his low shoulder and turned to the detective with a knowing smile.

"Seems to me there ought to be a starting point in this neighborhood. Woman calls on Tibbets. Wants money. He knows her, but hasn't seen her for years. Some person kills her. What for? For the jewels she brought to Tibbets for security? I say not."

"You say not, Boston? What right have you to say that?"

The shoulder dropped and the man returned to the fire."

"It looks otherwise to me—that's why," he answered, after a pause. "I don't believe she was killed for the jewels though she may have had a king's ransom in the satchel."

"But, why don't you?" and the hand of the ferret caught the arm and turned its owner half way around.

"Because I saw something."

"What did you see, and when, and where?" demanded Dan.

"I saw a man come down those stairs and it wasn't Tibbets, either."

"When did you see him?"

"I have made a calculation as near as I could. From what Tibbets says, it must have been while he was posting the letter."

Damon took a long breath. Was this a clew to the Miggs mystery?

"What was the man like?" he eagerly asked.

"I can't tell you, for if he did the deed, I wouldn't give him away for all this world."

The face of the speaker was deadly white.

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTY'S SPOTTED PET.

"WHY don't you toss 'em up again? Mebbe they'll fall better next time. You shouldn't let anything like that discourage you. I wouldn't."

"No, of course you wouldn't, for you know how to get back at fortune. Here they go! If history repeats itself, I go, and you'll never again see Simon Sulks."

The last speaker, who was balancing two gold pieces on his fingers, threw them toward the ceiling and watched them as they fell back to the floor where, after a few spins, they settled down between two cracks.

"How is it, this time?" asked the single spectator of the throw, a fine-looking man, with gleaming eyes and a dark but handsome face, who leaned against one of the walls of the apartment with his arms folded on his ample chest, and more than passing interest in his eye.

"A little better for once," replied the young man.

"Will you try again?"

"Yes, three times on the new deal."

Once more the yellow pieces spun toward the ceiling and came down with the same musical ring as before.

"That makes it even. Everything is to be decided by this toss," remarked the thrower, picking up the money and glancing at his companion, who was older and had apparently seen more of the world.

For the third time the eagles soared to the ceiling, and when they settled on the floor the youth bent over them with an eagerness that seemed to deprive his face of every vestige of color.

"Gods! I stay!" he cried.

A faint smile passed over the face of the man at the wall.

The young man caught up the money and thrust it into his pocket, then crossed the room and threw himself into a chair at a small desk in one corner under a window.

"It was the turn of the tide, eh? You will bless the day they turned up right for you."

"I don't know, but I hope so," replied Simon, whose eyes appeared to settle back into his head, and who opened the desk and took out a package of papers.

"What about that murder last night?" he asked.

The handsome man with the dark face and waxed mustache had left the wall and was standing in the middle of the chamber.

"What murder?"

"What! haven't you seen the account of it? Here!"

Simon threw a paper toward the man and turned to the work before him.

"A woman killed. Pish! the world can spare a few thousand of such people. It doesn't interest me," but Simon saw that the speaker was de-

vouring the account of Madeline Miggs's death, and noticed that he did not relinquish the newspaper until he had read the whole of it.

"The shadow sharps of a city like this would starve if they hadn't something of this kind to fatten on," the man went on, throwing the paper across the chair. "You may keep the run of this affair, Simon; but you don't want to let it interfere with business."

With this he walked to the door and opened it.

"Shall I be here all day?"

"No; copy the papers in your hand and do it well. Don't let a word escape you and be astonished at nothing you see."

In another moment the young man was alone and he heard the door shut with a creak.

"That man is mystery personified," he said, looking toward the portal. "I hardly know whether I wish I knew more about him or not. Captain Tunis is a queer one and no mistake, but it won't do to go too deep into his history. I won't be the one to do it."

Captain Tunis, as he was called, was known to but few people in the city of millions. He had come to New York some six months prior to the Miggs mystery and had taken the house in which we have just met him.

There was a Southern look to him, and his ways showed that he had been to lands under the tropic sun, but no one really knew much about him.

If he had secrets, and men of his demeanor and looks generally have, he had the knack of keeping them from the public and no one had ever got beyond the door of his inner life.

Captain Tunis had passed his forties though he did not look so when in the presence of Simon Sulks, the youth who acted as his private secretary.

He had never been heard to refer to service, afloat or ashore, consequently it was thought that the title "captain" was merely honorary and had not been gained where men die at the cannon's mouth.

Let us follow this man.

He walked rapidly toward one of the little squares of the city and after taking a turn through it took a seat and pulled out a cigar-case.

He was in the act of lighting a cheroot—he never smoked anything else though he looked able to indulge in the finest—when his attention was called to a man who came from the furthest end of the Square, and who, on seeing him, turned aside and vanished.

"That's a queer go," said Captain Tunis. "He acts as if he don't want to see me after the appointment. I'll wait till he changes his mind and if he doesn't do that very soon, I'll know why."

He smoked away as if he had not seen the man and in a little while the same person came in sight again.

This time he came toward Captain Tunis, when it was seen that his face was dark like that of the man on the bench, and presently the two were looking at one another.

"You weren't trying to give me the slip, were you?" asked the man with the waxed mustache.

"No. Why should I? I thought I saw a man I wished to avoid and that's why I turned aside for a time."

"Well, what do you know?"

"Not much."

"Is he getting better?"

"Oh, yes; he's well again."

"And the same man as before his sickness?"

"Apparently so."

"And the girl?"

"Always the same."

"You haven't seen the other man about lately?"

"No."

Captain Tunis threw his half-smoked cigar among the bushes.

"When do you think he will come back?" he asked.

"The other one?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

"Come here."

The man went toward Captain Tunis and fell under the scrutiny of the deep black eyes.

"I want you to carry a message for me," said the dark-faced man. "I will write it now," and taking out note-book and pencil, he began to write.

When the note was folded Captain Tunis took from his pocket a bit of scarlet wax which he moistened with his breath and attached it to the paper.

"Take this to her. Don't lose it. Be off!"

The other took the note with some fear and fell back, looking first at the paper and then at the man who had intrusted it to him; then he turned and vanished.

"Shall I?" the messenger said to himself, stopping short and feeling the note in his pocket.

"Shall I carry it to that woman with the cold hand and the serpent eyes? Shall I go to her house and let her charm me as the snake charms the bird it kills and eats? I don't want to, but—My God! I am in the grip of Captain Tunis. I am in the snare of that deadly rascal, and to

disobey him is to feel the hand that kills and leaves no mark."

The man went on, crossing street after street until he turned down one where the lamps were lighted and where the houses were strangely alike.

He ran up a flight of steps and nervously jerked a bell. In a moment the answer came and the door opened to reveal a woman's face and a woman's hand.

The messenger slipped into the house and was conducted to a room on the right of the hall, where the person who had admitted him stood in the center of the carpet, extending her hand.

She seemed to know what had brought him to the house.

He took the note from his pocket and handed it to her, then watched her become oblivious to everything but its contents, for she dropped into a sumptuous arm-chair and began to read it.

All at once the young messenger—he was young, though he looked beyond his real years—heard a sound which caused him to turn his head.

"Jehosaphat!" he cried, almost leaving the chair.

The handsome woman looked up and smiled.

"Cleo, down!" she said in tones of command, and there crouched at the foot of the young man's chair a beautiful full-grown leopardess whose eyes shone like balls of fire and whose skin was sleek and lovely with spots.

"Can I go?" asked the messenger with a shudder as he looked down at the animal.

"Yes, if Cleo doesn't object."

The youth reached down and picked up his hat, but that moment the animal stretched out her spotted neck and he drew back in fear.

Not noticing this, the woman continued reading Captain Tunis's note, and not until she had reached the end of it and crushed it in her hand with a smile did she observe the actions of the animal or the man's fright.

"Cleo will keep you company," she said, rising and parting the rich red curtains that concealed one-half of the chamber from the messenger's gaze.

"Cleo be hanged!" grated the youth. "It is the first time I knew you kept a servant of this description. I have read about such things in books, but this is my first real experience."

There was no reply, for the woman was gone, and the man and the beast were the only occupants of the parlor.

He looked down into the eyes that swam in a fiery liquid and seemed to measure the distance between him and the door.

"This is what I get for falling into the hands of that man of mystery who is the friend of this angel of death," he muttered. "I would give my life almost to be out of the net, but I get deeper and deeper into it every day, and some time I will be found dead, tangled in the fatal meshes, and the world will wonder how Jack Parsons's life was snuffed out."

The leopardess now arose and crept toward the red curtains, and seeing her back turned toward him, Jack left his chair without noise.

"She can send her answer through the mails. I don't want to be watched and maybe bitten by this spotted cat of the jungle. I want to get out of this accursed house!"

He reached the door and was nearly in the hall, when, with a cry almost human, the beast came across the velvet carpet and fell upon him.

"Merciful God!" arose to the lips of the terrified man as he felt the claws fasten in his flesh, though they did him no particular damage, for the leopardess was in a half playful mood. "Curse me if I don't kill her!"

Rendered desperate as he was borne back toward the fireplace, he caught up a short tomahawk with a carved handle that met his gaze on a bracket and the next instant he was poised it over the animal's head.

Suddenly the red curtains parted and there sprung into the room, with a loud cry, the hands of a woman.

"Don't strike Cleo! If you do you forfeit your life!"

"Take her off, then!" yelled the desperate man.

Instead of doing so the woman called to the animal, which was slowly dragging Jack Parsons to the floor, but the leopardess was not inclined to relinquish her hold, now having drawn blood, which infuriated her.

"You won't, eh? Then, by heavens! she dies!" cried the man, and down came the heavy relic of savage life, and crashing its way through skin and bone, it sunk to the handle in the spotted beauty's brain.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK'S SECOND MISSION.

A MOMENT of mingled horror and silence followed the fall of the keen-edged tomahawk.

The animal, dead, slid from the man's bosom, and dropped heavily upon the floor.

Her mistress stood where she had halted, spell-bound and like a person who had failed to take in all the situation.

Jack Parsons, still clutching the weapon as if he expected to use it again, looked at her and

seemed to realize that when she came to her senses it would be best for him to be beyond the door of that house.

He turned and bounded toward the hall. He tore open the door that kept him from the corridor, and with a cry of relief sprung toward the main entrance, as yet safe from capture.

At the door he dropped the tomahawk, and its fall seemed to startle into life the ravishing creature he had left behind.

The next moment he was startled by a cry that boded him no good, and jerking open the front door, he flung himself into the street and, without looking back, ran as if a legion of leopards were at his heels.

"It was by a hair," he said to himself when he stepped into a forbidding-looking den and dropped into a chair at a table standing in the darkest corner of its rear room. "I was a fool to remain there a second after killing the beast, but couldn't get my head for that time. Now, shall I go back to the old house and tell him what happened? No, I can't do that. I might tell Olive; but, no, I won't do that, either. Captain Tunis is hand in glove with that angel of death, and she said that if I harmed her pet I would forfeit my life. I've killed the leopardess; that's exactly what I've done."

When Jack Parsons emerged from the retreat where he had stopped to recover his nerves, he looked in every direction as if he more than half expected to see another leopard on his trail, and then he moved off with the greatest caution.

He did not go back to the Square where he had left Captain Tunis, but avoided it by going a long way around, and at last entered a magnificent house on one of the elegant streets of Gotham.

Night had fairly fallen now, and he crept upstairs and unlocked a door, beyond which he sat down and breathed free for the first time since quitting the house of the woman with the leopard.

The fright was still on him.

By and by he heard footsteps come up the steps, and presently a young girl with a fine sylph-like figure and handsome face looked in upon him.

"I heard you come in, Jack," she said. "You seemed to fall up-stairs; but of course—Heavens! what is that on your coat?"

The man looked down at his bosom and started.

There were dark stains there—the blood of the leopard!

"It looks like blood, Jack," continued the girl, coming forward and meeting his gaze in a manner he could not avoid.

He tried to speak, but stammered.

The girl fell back and shut the door, but did not quit the room.

"Something has happened," she said gently, though with decision. "You have come in from the street. You have blood on your clothes. Jack, there should be no secrets between us."

He looked up into her face and seemed to wince.

"I am in trouble about another matter," she went on. "I don't understand father's actions of late. He seems to be under a spell which is slowly sapping his life. This morning I found him seated like a corpse in his chair and when I tried to cheer him up he repulsed me and fled like one mad. Fled from me, Jack! And, what is more, an hour later I discovered in the same room a mutilated paper from which a certain piece had been freshly cut."

"A piece, Olive?"

"Yes. That excited my curiosity. I went out and got a paper just like that one and looked it over. I found what he had cut out. It was the account of a murder—the killing of a woman by some unknown hands in an old broker's office."

"Was her name Madeline Miggs?"

"Yes, yes. You have read the account?"

"I guess the whole city has."

"Well, that was what he cut out of the paper. Was it the cause of his deathlike appearance?"

Jack shook his head, but became voluble a moment after, as if he wanted to keep the girl's mind from the gouts of blood on his coat and thus prevent her from squeezing from him the story of his thrilling adventure with the leopard.

But, Olive Haskins, the only child of Lot Haskins, the millionaire, was not to be put off by anything like this cunning.

"You forget the blood-stains," she said, stooping and touching Jack's coat. "Have you had an altercation? Have you been waylaid?"

Her deep-blue eyes were fastened upon him in a manner that riveted his own gaze, and he felt the story of his fight for life bubbling to his lips.

"Jack, you and I must stand together when the shadow comes."

"The shadow, Olive?"

"Yes. It is coming. I feel it. That murder affects father. He hasn't been himself ever since he read it in the morning paper! You know that mamma was lost by the burning of a steamboat on the Mississippi, and ever since that time father seems to have lived in the shadow of something terrible."

"I have noticed that he isn't himself at times,

but I attributed the depression to business cares—"

"They don't affect him at all. Why should they with the money he has? He was out last night till late. He came in and stood for nearly ten minutes at my door, something he seldom does. Oh, Jack! what if he is losing his mind?"

Olive Haskins, white-faced, fell back to the wall and clasped her hands.

"You read that account?" she suddenly went on. "The woman killed was Madeline Miggs. Let me show you something, Jack—something that has filled me with nameless terrors ever since the discovery of it."

She opened the door and looked out into the hallway that led to her own room.

"Come. The coast is clear," she said, and he followed her out, glad to get rid of the questioning about the leopard's blood on his coat.

Olive led him to her boudoir, and shut the door after them.

"What shall I do with that?" she asked, taking from under lock and key a piece of small note-paper, which she handed him.

Jack went toward the light and read as follows:

"LOT HASKINS:—

"I must see you on business that affects the happiness of more than one person. Do not refuse me, for I can open the sealed past and destroy or make glad, if your heart is in the right condition. Come to-night, to No. —K—street, and ask for me. Ask for 'M. M.', nothing more. Let the hour be nine, not a second later. For the sake of the past don't fail me!

M. M."

When Jack looked up he beheld the eyes of Olive riveted upon him.

Her whole form trembled, and he thought for a moment that she was about to sink in a swoon at his feet.

"Jack," she cried, clutching his sleeve, "you must stand by me. You share this secret with me. You must go to this house. I must know who sent him that note. What shall I do with it?"

Jack Parsons looked toward the fire glowing in the boudoir grate, but hesitated.

"Shall I keep it?" asked Olive, "or shall I give it to the flames, and let him miss it the remainder of his life?"

"Keep it for the present, Olive. Don't burn it just yet."

"But you must go."

Jack thought of the danger from which he had just escaped. He recalled the scene at the leopard-infested house, but did not stir.

"You must go. I am in the toils of some accursed spell. We are all under it. The man who comes here to see father has eyes that look one through and read the secrets of the human soul. They call him Captain Tunis. They call him that everywhere; but here, sometimes, he has another name."

Jack Parsons went from the boudoir back to his own chamber.

"If I go out and cross the path of that woman, what will happen?" he said. "I would give worlds if I had never seen either of them, but I'm in it now. That note is full of mystery. The street is one which millionaires don't visit very often, and, what is stranger still, the initials are those of the woman killed last night in old Tibbets's den."

Ten minutes later he was slipping from the house by the rear door, where he met Olive, and heard her "God speed" as she held it open for him to creep out.

He kept the direction in his head, and, afraid to take a car, he flitted from street to street until he found himself on the one designated in the note.

Half the time since leaving the Haskins mansion, Olive's messenger thought he heard the almost silken tread of another leopard behind him, and when he reached the door without encountering the mate of the one he had brained with the Modoc tomahawk, he felt like congratulating himself.

His rap elicited a prompt response and he looked into the thin, hatchet-like face of a woman of uncertain age.

"Have you a lady boarder?" asked Jack, hardly knowing how to broach his errand.

"I can't say. I had one, but she went off last night and that's the last I've seen of her."

"Went off last night? Out of the city?"

"I cannot tell you. She left no word behind. She has been here nearly three weeks, rents paid ahead till the twenty-fifth. Quiet lodger, seemed to keep herself indoors most of the time. Her name was—let me see—Madeline Miggs."

"Great Caesar's ghost!" cried Jack, falling back from the woman in the hall while she looked at him, suddenly frightened.

"What, have you news concerning her?" cried the woman. "I hope no harm has befallen her, for you don't always get a boarder like her."

Jack caught his breath with an effort.

"Do you read the papers?" he asked.

"When I get time I do."

"Then, you haven't read those of to-day?"

"No, I haven't."

What sort of boarding-house master is this? thought Jack Parsons.

"What was your boarder like, and did she have a caller last night about nine o'clock?"

"She wasn't handsome, but she had a good figure and was chatty when she didn't have fits of depression. No, I can't say that she had a caller last night—not in this house, anyway."

"You were home?"

"I never go out after dark."

"And Madeline Miggs left, when?"

"I heard her come down-stairs and noted the time. It was the first time she went out at that hour—half past nine."

"And she didn't come back?"

"She didn't come back."

"Madame, do you know—"

Jack stopped.

"I won't tell her, for I don't want to be dragged into a notoriety which might tangle me more and more in the meshes of the net of fate. They'll find her out soon enough, or she'll go and look at the papers now.—Madame, do you know that your boarder may have gone off for good?"

"And left all her baggage behind?" cried the landlady. "She hasn't very much, that's a fact, but what little there is may be dear to her. I hope she'll turn up yet safe and sound. Is that all, sir?"

"That's all, madame," and Jack, touching his hat, withdrew and found himself on the street again.

"I wonder if the detectives have found out what I have?" he said to himself. "I know where Madeline Miggs boarded, and that might be the starting point of a 'great trail,' as they say. And Lot Haskins, the millionaire, one of the men I serve, was to have called on her last night. She went from that little boarding-house to her death in old Tibbets's office. Now, why did she want the nabob to call on her, and why did he cut from the morning paper the account of her death?"

The mystery was too deep for Jack Parsons.

He went back to the Haskins mansion, and let himself into the house by the rear door.

As he passed down the hall he saw a door open, and for a moment in the light beyond he caught sight of the tall and well-known figure of Captain Tunis!

"The devil wears his livery well," hissed Jack, dodging out of sight, and in a moment he stood in the corridor above and face to face with Olive.

"He is down there!" she cried. "The blood of Madeline Miggs is the price being paid for my soul!"

Jack heard the grating of the girl's white teeth.

CHAPTER V.

WELL-PUMPED.

GILT-EDGE DAN, the detective, had not lived round the corner all the time without knowing something about the people in the immediate neighborhood.

Epsom Tibbets, the man brought suddenly into prominence by the mysterious murder of Madeline Miggs, was one of those upon whom the ferret had bestowed some of his spare time; not that he ever expected to have anything to do with Tibbets in a criminal way, but because he was a spider who sat in his web catching every fly that came his way.

The detective had discovered that the old man who wore his coat buttoned to the chin summer and winter had not always been a broker.

He ascertained that Tibbets had traveled a great deal, had been to foreign countries, for he seemed to know a good deal about these when he could be induced to talk, and he talked to Gilt-Edge Dan some time before he ferreted out the man's calling.

After that he was quite reticent concerning his travels, and the detective seemed to cease his inquiries in that direction.

Now his conversations with Tibbets all came back to him, and he wondered where the man had met Madeline Miggs.

The second day after the murder the ferret found the office locked up, and a second call late in the afternoon discovered it in the same condition.

He was sure the old man had not left the city, for he had been held as a witness in the strange murder case, but all efforts on Gilt-Edge Dan's part seemed unavailing, and at nightfall he had not unearthed the "shaver" broker.

There is a good deal of luck connected with a detective's life and Dan Damon struck a streak of it that very evening, for turning a corner he came suddenly face to face with the very man he had been looking for.

Epsom Tibbets had his coat more than buttoned to his chin. He had added a muffler to his wardrobe and as he dodged around the corner hoping to escape the man who had found him, he was halted by a hand on his arm.

"I've been looking for you," announced Gilt-Edge Dan.

"Well? I'm here. You've found me. Congratulations, I suppose."

The ferret smiled and the next moment he was walking with Tibbets down the street.

"Shall we go back to the old office?"

"Where it happened?" and the broker turned and looked the detective full in the face. "Not for the world. Miggs died there. Miggs! She hadn't the good sense to die elsewhere."

"Then we'll go back to your boarding house." It seemed Tibbets's turn to smile, for a strange one passed over his parchment-like face.

"I haven't a boarding house. Got a den, though. Yes, we'll go there."

Five minutes' walk brought the pair to a rather quiet street where Tibbets found a small house which looked harmless enough, and in a short time the ferret had been ushered into a room which told without inquiry that it was a bachelor's abode.

"I exist here. Haven't lived anywhere else for years. Like it? Yes. No listeners. Miggs? Confound that woman!"

Gilt-Edge Dan watched the man while he spoke and for a moment said nothing.

"Look here, Tibbets: are you going to tell more than you have after awhile?" he asked at last.

Epsom Tibbets started.

"More than I have?" he echoed. "How can I?"

"You know more. You have seen Miggs before she came to New York. You met her somewhere; you know something about her history."

Tibbets looked at the door and then returned to the man watching him like a hawk.

Damon had sized this man up. He loved money more than anything else, and he would not make a move that threatened to come between him and his business of fleecing the public.

"Will they want me to tell all I know?" he asked.

"Maybe so. You occupied the office where Miggs was murdered, for murdered she was, and that with a dagger which found her heart by a hand that came down over her head while she was awaiting your return. Think a moment, Tibbets. It was in your office."

"Been thinking about that ever since," was the curt, snapped-off reply. "It couldn't have happened elsewhere, I suppose. Had to take place in my office just to destroy my business."

"Leave your business for a little and come back to mine," rejoined the detective, rather preposterously.

"Well?"

"This woman, Madeline Miggs. Where did she live?"

"Don't know."

"She gave you no clew, then?"

"None."

"She came to you wanting a loan and dispayed a lot of diamonds."

"Sparklers, and I would have them to show you if the murderer had not cabbaged them when he went off."

"How do you know a man did it?"

Tibbets was taken aback at this. He fell back in his chair and for several moments looked Gilt-Edge Dan in the eye.

"Guess-work," he said. "I said 'he' because women don't kill people very often. But I'll leave that blank if you like it best that way. I think it best myself."

"What was Miggs's past? Who was she and was she ever married?"

"Married? Yes."

"Her husband—?"

"Rich man. Worth thousands while Miggs hadn't much in the world."

"But she had diamonds when she came to your office."

"Fine ones, too."

"Were they family jewels?"

"Perhaps."

The detective did not like this thing of getting his information bit by bit and some of the bits not very satisfactory. It was like extracting blood from a turnip drop by drop. He resolved to change his tactics.

"Tibbets, it will be to your advantage to tell me the whole history of Madeline Miggs as you know it. Go back to the beginning and come down to date."

The wily man in the chair opposite looked half-terrified and then leaned toward Gilt-Edge Dan, showing his teeth in a half-smile.

"I don't know much. She was Miggs when I first met her and Miggs when she died."

"Go on."

The ferret was getting to be as curt as the broker.

"My God! you don't want the full history of her life, for half of it wouldn't benefit you one bit. It's a rambling history. Skeleton in closet, you know. Skeleton with grinning teeth and fleshless bones. Miggs knew that I knew, for she recognized me just before I went down to mail letter."

"One moment," cried the detective. "It took you some time to post that letter, didn't it?"

"Why?"

"It isn't five minutes' walk to and from the nearest b.x. You must have stopped somewhere."

"I did. I was dry."

"You mean you wanted a nip?"

"Nip. I went into Jack's place and got it. No law against that, I suppose."

"Who did you see in at Jack's?"

"A man; thought I knew him, but second look showed that I was mistaken."

"Did he remain till you went out?"

"Think not. Don't know when he went off."

Then there was the man who wanted to know where G—street was."

"You told him?"

"Certainly. He started off and after that I went back to Miggs. You know the rest."

Gilt-Edge Dan seemed to reflect a moment.

"Have you thought of these two occurrences since? I mean have you suspected that the two men you encountered that night might throw some light on this murder mystery?"

Tibbets opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

"The man in the saloon and the one on the street?" he asked.

"Just so."

"Never entered my head that this might be."

"Did they look alike?"

"Can't say, only that they were of the same height. The one on the street didn't let me see much of his face."

"Mr. Tibbets, the man you saw in the saloon that night left before you did."

"Ahem. That was a privilege he had," hummed the broker.

"You were detained between the letter-box and your office for a purpose."

"Think so?"

"You were kept away while the deed was being done."

"Kept away by the man I met on the street?"

"Perhaps."

"Wasn't talking to him a minute."

"A minute is a year in some cases. But we'll go back to Miggs's history."

Tibbets said nothing. It was evident that he did not like the situation, but he said nothing until the detective spoke again.

"Madeline Miggs," said the broker, "was a Southern girl. She wasn't very handsome, but she had a good many admirers for her figure and her decidedly good qualities. When she married it was thought she did well, for her husband was rich and young and that's the main desideratum nowadays. But they didn't live together very long."

"Why not?"

"Steamboat explosion."

"Did Miggs lose her husband in that way?"

"No, husband lost Miggs."

Gilt-Edge Dan was looking at the man in the high-backed chair, wondering if he was trying to spin a yarn to keep him off of the real trail.

"It was this way: Husband and child were at the North. Miggs remained at home to nurse her sick mother. When the old lady got well, Miggs embarked. Boat blew up. Miggs was put down among the lost, and that ended it."

"But, she wasn't lost?"

"She lived to be killed in my office."

"What became of her husband and child?"

"They got over it. He grew richer than ever, and the child grew up to be prettier than her mother."

"Where are they?"

"In this city."

"Did he ever learn that his wife was saved?"

"I guess not."

"In Heaven's name, why didn't she come to him after she recovered from the catastrophe?"

"That's what I don't know. There's no accounting for the ways of women. Years rolled on. He grew rich, I say; his child is now a young woman."

"What is this man's name?"

Epsom Tibbets coughed. He wound his long fingers about one another, and looked up at the watchful detective.

"Haskins," he said at length.

"Lot Haskins?"

"The millionaire. That's the man. He married Miggs. You know him, eh?"

Dan Damon had received his first real shock.

Lot Haskins, the man of three millions, according to the rating of wealth in Gotham, the husband of this murdered woman?

He looked at Tibbets, but saw the impress of truth on his countenance.

"Do you think she ever intended to reveal herself to him?" he asked at last.

"Don't know, but he would have given her a warm reception."

"Warm in what way?"

"He would have taken her back. Lot Haskins would have been glad to take her home."

A short silence fell between the two men.

"Now, Tibbets, had the woman any enemies that you know of?"

Epsom Tibbets shook his head.

"That's for you," he said. "You're a clever-finder. Isn't that your work, Captain Damon?"

"Yes. And, what is more, I will find out! Thanks, Tibbets. Count me your friend from this time on."

Tibbets felt so grateful that he felt like unbuttoning his coat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FERRET AND THE MILLIONAIRE.

LOT HASKINS, millionaire and widower, sat in his library the day after Jack Parsons's visit to the elegant home of the leopardess.

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and well rounded, and altogether he looked like a man who had never quarreled with the world.

If he knew that the woman killed in Tibbets's office had been his wife—if the newspaper in describing the body had given him a clew to the past, he did not betray himself in the library of his home.

Suddenly the door bell rung and the millionaire heard the footsteps of the maid who answered all rings.

Presently the door leading into the library opened and Haskins turned his head with an inquisitive look.

"Gentleman at the door. Wants to know if Mr. Haskins is at home," said the maid.

"Who is he?"

The hand extended toward the man of wealth held a card which he took and leaned with it toward the window where a ray of daylight struggled into the room.

He read:

"DANIEL DAMON."

There seemed in the name standing alone on the plain white card something that puzzled the nabob, but he looked at the waiting maid and told her to admit the caller.

"Who is this man, anyhow?" he asked himself in the brief interval that intervened between the girl's departure and the second opening of the library door.

The detective came forward, and was looked at by the man in the chair with a good deal of curiosity.

"You are Mr. Damon, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes. I am Daniel Damon, a detective, and I am here on a matter of business that may concern you."

There was no start on Haskins's part, only the lips seemed to meet with added firmness and his look became deeper, as if he would read the nature of the man-hunter's business before it was openly proclaimed.

Gilt-Edge Dan took a chair and the curtains, rolling up, let more light into the room and enabled him to study the face before him.

"You will pardon me," began Dan. "I am going back in your history somewhat. You lost your wife in an accident on the Mississippi?"

The hands of Haskins seemed to grow nervous, but he kept a cool exterior.

"I don't see why you have to refer to the dark past of my married life," he said. "You come to my house proclaiming yourself a detective, and the first thing you do is to go back to the terrible event that half orphaned my child."

"It was long ago, and time softens all griefs," said Gilt-Edge Dan, not seeming to notice the millionaire's last words. "We men of the trail have to hurt private feelings sometimes—"

"But in God's name, why do you hurt mine?"

The detective looked at the man before him, and then dropping his voice to lower tones, he went on:

"Do I shatter them when I say that your wife wasn't lost that night on the river?"

Lot Haskins sunk deeper into the soft cushions of the chair he filled, and with his hands clinched at its sides, gazed into the calm, imperturbable face of the tracker.

"I am through. This interview need not be carried on from this point."

"But you will hear me a little further. Your child wasn't orphaned until two nights since."

There was no reply.

"I say she wasn't motherless until Madeline Meggs was killed in Epsom Tibbets's office."

Lot Haskins almost sprung from his chair, and only by a determined effort did he keep his seat.

"I guess you might as well go on, for you have come to me to say something," he said. "I will be patient, because I am rather anxious to see how far you will carry this play. Go on."

"Your wife was the victim of that crime. She had been in the city for some time. She went to Tibbets for money, took her jewels with her; but was killed there."

"I couldn't have prevented the horrible crime," protested Haskins. "I didn't know she was going to Tibbets."

"But you knew she was in the city?"

"Do you accuse me of knowing this?"

"Yes; I say you knew it."

The nabob rose and stood erect. His face was white, and his eyes were riveted upon the man who watched him from his chair.

"I know something about men of your stamp. I did not kill this woman, for nothing could have induced me to touch with evil intent the mother of my child. If she had come to me, all would have been blotted out in happiness, but she held back—hid herself all these years, and turns up only to be killed by some unknown hand."

Lot Haskins spoke slowly and with distinctness, though he seemed to have lowered his voice for a purpose.

"Why didn't you go to her?" asked the detective.

"It was her place to come to me. But she hid in the city, and instead of coming to this house, went to a money shark when I had thousands for her."

"What are you going to do about the case?"

"What can I do? I have sent to the Morgue more than enough to bury her."

"On your family lot!"

"Heavens no! I couldn't do that. That would make Olive ask questions, and it was best for her to believe what she has believed for years—that her mother sleeps beneath the waves of the Father of Waters."

The voice of the nabob seemed an appeal and the detective felt that he was tearing a piece of his heart away.

What, acknowledge that Madeline Meggs was his wife and the mother of his child? There would have been a sensation, and Lot Haskins was as proud as he was rich.

"You and I can keep this secret," continued the millionaire, coming nearer to the ferret while he watched him closely. "It need get no further than ourselves. I don't need to ask how you discovered this, for you men pick up strange clews in the practice of your profession. You will readily understand why I want it kept. There is Olive, her child and mine. The girl is nervous and a shock might prove fatal."

Gilt-Edge Dan understood these words.

"I am going to the bottom of this mystery of Madeline Meggs," he said. "As a detective, I intend to run to earth the hand that took her life."

"And expose the skeleton which the crime has placed in my closet?"

"I shall do justice all around."

"Justice!" cried Haskins, losing color again. "You mean that, for the sake of getting a little more professional fame, you will tear open a secret and place Olive and I unpleasantly before the world."

"I mean nothing of the kind. Do you want the murderer of your wife to remain undiscovered?"

This was an arrow which went to the center of the target. The nabob winced.

"I don't want that publicity which will make me the target for gossip and newspaper criticism."

"Then you want the dark crime buried—you want the wife of your early love, the mother of your child, to sleep unavenged!"

"Not that; but—"

Dan Damon waited for the ending of the sentence, but he waited in vain.

Instead of completing it, the nabob crossed the room and opened his private desk that stood in one corner.

He put his hands into the depths of the desk and then came back with a piece of paper in his grasp.

"I am willing to swear that the newspapers gave me the first inkling of the tragedy at the office," he said.

"I am quite willing to believe that, Mr. Haskins."

"Then, why not let me live in peace? Here, fill this out to suit yourself. There are writing materials on the table."

The unsigned check on tinted paper was thrust under the very nose of the wonder-sharp, but his hand brushed it aside.

"What, won't you take it? Any sum you name!" exclaimed Haskins. "I'm no beggar, and you will find that you are dealing with a liberal man. Don't let your modesty keep you out of a good thing."

This was about the coolest bribe the man-hunter had ever encountered.

He had to look the second time into the eyes above him to see whether they were guilty ones, but their look was firm, and nothing like guilt shone in their depths.

"I take no bribes," said Dan at length. "I want to know who killed Madeline Meggs, as she was called."

"Curiosity, eh?"

"That and a desire to bring the guilty to justice."

"It might prove a bitter trail for you."

"All right. The bitterer the better," smiled the fearless ferret.

"You don't know what dangers you might encounter, for the hand that killed my wife may be strengthened by others just as steady."

"I understand; but you want her avenged, don't you, Lot Haskins?"

"I don't want to be dragged into this dark, damnable crime in any manner."

"Why, you are in it now!"

"How?"

"As the husband of the murdered woman," answered the detective.

The long breath Lot Haskins took told the detective that he realized this.

"You men are not millionaires," he said with a faint smile. "I'll fill the check myself."

"Not for me," interrupted Damon, while Haskins walked to the table. "I am going to the bottom of this mystery."

"You are?"

Haskins turned upon Gilt-Edge Dan with something like the mien of a tiger.

"You are, eh?" he replied. "You are going to drag me into the mix, and thrust Olive into unpleasant notoriety, besides opening the family closet and exposing the skeleton there! I shall keep my head if you do, and I guess that at the end of the game I will be found in a better plight than others."

He threw the unfilled check upon the table,

and stood like a lion brought to bay before the cool-headed man who watched him like a hawk.

"I have friends who believe in me. I have wealth," he went on. "I will, if necessary, come out and say that this woman was my wife. The old accident, passed out of everybody's mind, will be retold. I will beat you by confessing everything; but, I didn't kill Madeline Meggs, for if she had come to me she would have been taken back and acknowledged as my lost wife and Olive's mother."

"Do you know who her enemies were?" asked Dan.

"Somebody wanted the jewels Tibbets said she had with her, I suppose."

"They carried them off. Were they family diamonds?"

"The ones I gave her on her wedding day, from what I have seen of Tibbets's statement."

"Had you heard direct from her since her coming to this city?"

Lot Haskins seemed to hesitate.

"Yes," he said at last. "I heard from her the other night; by the way, the very night that proved so fatal to her. She sent for me. I went out, but didn't find her. Wait! I'll show you that I am not playing a game."

He went back to his desk, looked through it some time and then turned to the detective, perplexed and mystified.

"I've lost the note she sent, but, never mind. It was brief and I obeyed it."

At this juncture the clear tones of the door-bell startled Lot Haskins and then footsteps were heard in the hall.

In another minute the library door had opened and Gilt-Edge Dan, turning suddenly, stood face to face with a tall, handsome, dark-faced man.

"Captain Tunis, Daniel Damon, a detective," said Haskins.

The black eyes leaped up and glittered for an instant; the hand of Captain Tunis reached out, and the soft fingers overlapped Damon's hand.

The detective felt that another principal had come into the game.

CHAPTER VII.

HELD UP AND ROBBED.

In the act of quitting the millionaire's mansion when Captain Tunis came, Dan Damon did not see fit to prolong his visit, and getting away as neatly as he could, he soon found himself on the street.

"Captain Tunis, eh?" he exclaimed. "Appears to be on good terms with Haskins. What eyes he has and what a soft, silken hand! There is something dangerous about him, something that reminds one of the buried claws of the tiger. Comes in without the formality of a card and no doubt goes when he pleases."

The detective did not know that he had been followed from the house, not by the person he had so suddenly encountered there, but by a young man who hastened after him, yet who did not stop him on the street, preferring to follow him home where he knocked at his door and was admitted.

"I am Jack—Jack Parsons," explained this person, before Gilt-Edge Dan could speak. "I come at the solicitation of Olive; and, then, I have an ax to grind, myself."

Jack leaned against the detective's table, disdaining the chair that awaited him, and for a moment looked into Damon's upturned face.

"I live under the same roof that shelters Lot Haskins, the father of Olive," he went on.

"Hal at No. 1324?" said the ferret.

Jack nodded.

"I am here at Olive's command. She is in trouble. The girl could not help overhearing a part of the conversation that passed between you and her father."

The detective looked away to avoid the eyes of the handsome young fellow just for a moment.

"Is all this true?" asked Jack. "I will keep whatever you tell me. Olive and I are friends and we haven't any secrets from each other. I couldn't keep one from her if I tried. Why, she wormed from me my tussle with the leopard."

"With the leopard?" queried Dan.

"Yes, but that story is neither here nor there in this matter. Is it true? Was Madeline Meggs Olive's mother?"

"You say she overheard what was said in the library before Captain Tunis came?"

"Captain Tunis, the miserable effigy of Satan!" grated Jack. "That wretch has gone unhung too long already."

"Do you know him?"

There was hesitation on Jack's part.

"How long has he been coming to the house?" continued Gilt-Edge Dan.

"Nearly a year; but he never showed his hand till within the last six weeks."

"How showed his hand?"

Jack sent an uneasy glance toward the door.

"Pardon me, but ever since I had the tussle with the leopard I think I hear her step again. But, it can't be, for I killed her dead—sunk the Modac tomahawk into her brain."

"If the animal were living, she could not come in here, for the door is locked. You are safe from leopards and all their owners, Mr. Parsons."

"From their owner, eh? By Jove! I wish I could think that way," exclaimed Jack. "May be it is so. I hope it is. But, we were talking about Madeline Miggs. Olive wants to know. She would like to see you, but it wouldn't do to have the meeting in the house."

"If you two have no secrets between you, why won't an interview with you do just as well?" queried Dan.

"I might forget, and, then, Olive wants to ask you a good many questions. You see, she is in trouble, the deepest she has ever had, and now comes this terrible revelation, one which her father would have kept from her. Her mother that woman who was killed in old Tibbets's den? I can't think it possible."

"Haskins has confessed to the truth."

"So Olive told me. Some-how-or-other I believe that the man you ran against there is mixed up in this dark affair. I wouldn't say it openly, for I am in a net myself. I am all tangled up in the accursed meshes, though heaven knows that I wish I were out of them and somewhere else than in this city."

"This man, Captain Tunis?" said the detective. "Where does he live?"

"He occupies a small house on O— street, No. 233."

"What does he do?"

"Nothing."

"Does he live alone?"

"I never crossed the threshold of the house, though I have met the young man who acts as his private secretary."

"He has such a helper, has he?"

"Yes, a young fellow named Simon Sulks. Captain Tunis is acquainted with the woman called Lura."

"Who is Lura?"

"She owned the leopard till I finished her," smiled Jack.

"Oh, you met and overcame the beast in New York, did you?"

"In New York, and not very many hours ago. I carried a note from Captain Tunis to Lura."

"Where does Lura live?"

Jack gave Damon the address of the owner of the leopard, and then touched his arm.

"I am turning traitor as fast as I can," he grinned. "I am playing Benedict Arnold just as smoothly as possible, but I can't serve two masters, and while I served Captain Tunis and Lura I was playing against Olive and her father."

The detective was silent for a moment.

"You don't know anything about Captain Tunis outside of his visits to the Haskins mansion?"

"I don't know much. Simon Sulks seems to know a good deal, for the young man is a spotter, with the keenest eyes I ever saw, and a disposition to find out other people's business."

"When did you first meet Captain Tunis?"

"Nearly a year ago. He seemed to fascinate me from the very first. I felt strangely in his presence, and his soft hands seem to electrify one. Did you touch them, Captain Damon?"

"I did. They are as soft as silk."

"Which renders them the more dangerous!" exclaimed Jack. "Olive calls them velveted claws. Lura has hands just like them, for when she touched me once I nearly fell to the floor."

"Does she live in style?"

"Yes; her house is in a good neighborhood, you see. Rugs on the floor, pictures on the wall and a private room, with red curtains for walls. Style? Think of a woman as beautiful as Lura living alone with a leopard! She'll have to give Jamrock another order now."

"Maybe you didn't quite finish the beast?"

"Didn't I?" cried Jack. "Didn't I feel the Modoc hatchet sink through the skull, and when the beast slid from my bosom, wasn't she as dead as Caesar?"

Gilt-Edge Dan seemed to laugh.

"You haven't been back to Lura's since?" he asked.

"Back to her house? Heavens, no!" was the answer, accompanied by a shudder. "I would as soon enter a cage of lions, and try to subdue them with a look."

For some time the two men talked in this strain, the detective now and then going back to Captain Tunis, and extracting from Jack some new point in regard to him.

Dan seemed interested in the man he had encountered at the millionaire's, and when he saw Jack Parsons pass from his little room, he had resolved to find out something more about this person with the soft hand and black eyes.

As for Jack, he stepped on the sidewalk and looked cautiously up and down the street.

The scene with the leopard was still present in his imagination, and the sudden step of some one at his elbow startled him into a quick spring.

"I might go by the house, anyhow," he said to himself. "I might pass along the sidewalk and see what's to be seen there, if anything. Dan Damon has something else to think of from now on. He knows what Olive and I know, and he will keep his word with us. I am nearly free from Captain Tunis. The man who has made me his slave by the strange powers he possesses, will soon have no more control over me, for I

have carried my last note for him and have gone to Lura for the last time."

Jack Parsons could have gone home and escaped the adventure about to befall him, but his ungovernable curiosit got the upper hand, and instead of entering the Haskins mansion, he found himself on the street where he had encountered the spotted empress of the jungle.

As he neared the house he pulled his hat over his eyes and kept in the shadows of the trees.

The place inhabited by Lura gave forth no particular signs that it was occupied by a woman of her stamp, and Jack, looking at the front windows, which were shuttered, wondered what was going on within at that hour.

Had she got another leopard? Was she still mourning the loss of her pet, and would she do without another, or send somewhere and recruit her small menagerie?

Jack was almost opposite the house when the front door opened and an agile figure came out and stood for a moment on the steps.

It's Simon Sulks, the private secretary!" said the young man to himself. "That's the first time I ever saw him come out of the house. But, why not? He serves Captain Tunis, and Captain Tunis and Lura are hand-in-glove."

By this time the youth, who was well dressed and good-looking, stepped down and walked away.

"I'll just see, Simon," decided Jack. "I'll take time enough to see if you go home right off."

In another moment he was at Simon's heels, and ere long had tracked him to a dark street where he seemed to have lost his bearings.

Simon stopped and looked in every direction.

All the time Jack watched him and when he started off again he followed as before.

"Halt!" said Jack to himself as the private secretary stopped once more and fumbled in his pocket.

Simon ran up a flight of steps, but before he could knock, he was seized from behind by a spry figure that leaped from the shadows and tore him from the step.

"Help! help!" cried Simon, struggling in the man's grip.

"Silence!" Jack heard hissed in startling tones. "If you cry out again I will kill you, and leave you in the street."

Jack Parsons, held spellbound by these scenes, saw Simon forced up against the very house he intended to enter, and deliberately searched.

It was the coolest piece of street-robery he had ever heard of.

"Now go about your business; but if you enter that house and blow on me, you will never live to die of old age!"

Simon staggered from the wall when released, and threw his arms about one of the trees to prevent from falling to the sidewalk.

Meantime the man who had committed the robbery came toward Jack, hugging the shadows. He had a slouching, eager gait, and was seen for a second full in face and form as he flitted past the man on the watch.

"A monstrosity! One eye and a shrunken shoulder!" mentally exclaimed Jack. "Did you ever see anything like it? And he had the agility of a cat and the strength of a tiger. Who is that man? and why did he follow and rob Simon Sulks?"

But the deformed highwayman was gone now, and when Jack turned to see what had become of the private secretary, behold! he also had vanished.

"This beats me," said Jack, starting at last after the one-eyed man. "Maybe I can track him down before going home and find out something for Gilt-Edge Dan."

But, the man was lost.

Jack utterly failed to strike the trail, and when he found himself in the vicinity of the detective's den, he moved toward it and rapped at the door.

"Come in," said a voice that made Jack start. Olive's friend opened the door and saw seated before the fire a little girl whose eyes looked at him in wonderment.

"I am Clova," said the child. "I come here to warm whenever I am cold. I know how to get in, and Captain Dan is kind to me. He'll be in presently. What do you know?"

This was a queer question from a child; and Jack, amused, took a seat and began to talk.

"Here he comes," said Clova, as footsteps sounded in the hall, but they died away without coming to the door.

Jack got up and looked down the steps ending at the sidewalk.

"Gods!" he cried. "I wonder if he knew I was here?"

A man had just left the open hallway. It was Captain Tunis!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GILT-EDGE SHARP'S DESPERATE PLAY.

A MAN to be dreaded had just vanished down the street, and when Jack Parsons recovered his breath and went back up the stairs he seemed pale about the gills and the hand that opened the door appeared a trifle nervous.

"I guess I won't wait for Captain Dan," he said to the child on guard. "I'll go out and

come back, perhaps to-morrow," and out he went.

The little girl continued to warm herself by the fire and to watch the play of light and shadow on the walls of the apartment.

After a while the same footsteps came up the stairs and this time they seemed to stop at the door.

Little Clova had fallen asleep, but waking suddenly, she listened and at last crossed the floor.

She opened the door of the detective's office and looked out into the long semi-lighted hallway, but saw no one.

"Maybe I was dreaming, after all," she said. "Maybe I heard the noise in my sleep as people often do. I guess I'll go back; but I'll tell Captain Dan that he had a caller."

She searched in the only unlocked draw in the table and finding some paper there, took the stub of a pencil from her pocket and began to write slowly.

It was a task for the child, but at the end of ten minutes of hard laborious work she had produced the following:

"DEAR CAPTAIN DAN:—

"I have been in the old room again, getting warm. You have had a caller who did not give his name. He said he would call again. Then I thought I heard some one else come to the door. The man who was here went out, but didn't say if he saw any one. I will come back whenever I can, but now I am going home to The Rookery. I am obliged to you for the fire, and some day I will try to pay you back. CLOVA."

Leaving the letter on the table, the child unlocked the door and crept from the room.

Her little feet made no noise on the stairs and ere long she was on the sidewalk below.

As her figure disappeared round the corner a man came in sight and seemed to look in the direction she had taken.

"I wonder if any relationship exists between them?" he queried. "I would just like to know if she is anything to him more than a little waif of the city. Hang it all! I would like to see Dan Damon to-night. Will I have to wait till tomorrow? Then I'll go home."

This man had but one eye, and one of his shoulders drooped. He nimbled off and presently turned into a house which was not the abode of the wealthy, and reaching a room on the second floor, rear part, he lit the gas and threw himself into a chair, with a chuckle.

"Didn't get much, but I got something. It wasn't entirely a water-haul, but nearly so. Ha, ha!"

One of his hands dived into his pocket and found there a crumpled paper which he jerked into the light.

"Think of choking a man for this!" he laughed. "Think of spoiling Simon Sulks's collar for a bit of writing! But, I want Gilt-Edge to see it."

He read the writing, and, replacing it in the pocket, divested himself of his garments and went to bed.

The man with the single eye was home. The person who had robbed Simon Sulks in Jack Parsons's presence had returned to his nest and was falling asleep, with his mind made up to show the proceeds of his footpad business to the keenest detective in Gotham.

At that same hour Dan Damon was eagerly watching a young man who was explaining, in excited tones to a little Italian across a small chop table, how he had been held up and robbed.

Simon Sulks might have taken something to steady his nerves and it might have unsteadied his brain, for he was talking in an overtone and was heard by the detective who could hardly repress a smile at the narrative.

"Think of being held up by a one-eyed man!" said Simon. "I thought the single orb would fly from its owner's head and pierce my brain. I noticed, too, that the fellow had one low shoulder, for he had to hold me in a peculiar manner on account of it."

The Gilt-Edge Detective started.

"What has Boston been doing?" he asked himself. "Had he turned footpad and does he rob such fellows as this? I must give him a lecture or he will get into hot water, and when I really need him in this game, he may not be available."

"V'y you no follow him?" asked Simon's auditor.

"I will yet!" he cried, beating the table with his fist. "I will let him know that Simon Sulks don't let himself be held up and plundered with impunity."

"Ho, I thought so!" cried the detective. "From Jack's description of Captain Tunis's private secretary, I thought I had run across him. So Boston robbed you, did he, Simon? Well, what did he get?"

Gilt-Edge Dan continued to watch the pair till the Italian, who had feasted at Simon's expense, discovered that no more was coming, and withdrew.

Simon Sulks came past the ferret without taking more than passing notice of him and when he went out upon the street he was quietly tracked by Damon.

"Here!" suddenly cried a voice, and all at once a sharp exclamation rose to Simon's lips and he found himself again in the grip of a man,

but not the same one who had plundered him once before that very night.

"What are you doing here and where have you been?" demanded the man, who was Captain Tunis.

Simon would have cringed if the hand had not prevented and as it was, he recoiled and shivered.

"Man and slave. I see," said the single spectator, as he saw Simon led off in Captain Tunis's grip.

Down the street went this well-assorted pair, and Captain Tunis marched his charge home by the shortest route.

"I'll see what Boston got by the drag-net, decided Gilt-Edge Dan, turning back.

He knew where the one-eyed man lodged, and in less than thirty minutes he was rapping at his door.

Boston Bilkins opened it and fell back with a grin at sight of the wonder-sharp, then shut the door and locked it so as to keep out all intruders.

"Let me see the results of the drag-net," ordered the ferret.

"Who told you I made a cast?"

"The man who got caught."

"Simon Sulks?"

"Yes, Captain Tunis's private secretary."

Boston slouched across the room and fished up from his pantaloons pocket the paper he had obtained by the cool bit of business we have already witnessed.

"That's all," he said, disconsolately. "I went for bigger game, but that's all I scooped in."

Detective Dan was reading the writing while Boston talked and nothing told that the find was an important one.

"It's not very much is it?" queried the man with the low shoulder.

"It's something," answered Dan.

"A clew, eh?"

There was no reply.

"If I had known that it was nothing more than that, I don't believe I would have waited there for him."

"Do you know who sent Simon to that house with this letter?"

"Of course I do. It was Lura."

"Lura, the woman with the leopard?"

"Who told you she had a leopard?" cried Boston Bilkins. "But, never mind that. Yes, Lura sent him with the letter. Lura and Captain Tunis are friends and Simon Sulks is the captain's right-hand man."

"Boston, do you know what you said the night Madeline Meggs was killed?"

The one-eyed man looked at the detective, but said nothing.

"You said that you saw a man come down the steps leading to Tibbets's den, but that if you thought he killed Meggs, you wouldn't give him away for the world."

"Yes, I said that."

"Well, are you of the same opinion?"

"I am."

"But you don't think he had a hand in the murder, do you?"

"Before God, I don't!" averred Boston, solemnly. "I have been behind the bars, Captain Dan, and know that my word wouldn't go very far in a court of justice; but I swear by the memory of my mother that I don't think that man killed Madeline Meggs."

Gilt-Edge Dan went back to the letter and read it again.

"I have met Captain Tunis," he announced.

"You, Captain Dan? Where?"

"At Lot Haskins's house."

"Well?"

"He is handsome and has hands as soft as silk."

"So have the thugs of India! You met him there—under the same roof that shelters—that protects Lot Haskins?"

"It was an unexpected meeting and I didn't prolong it. Boston, I have work for you."

"In the interest of justice?"

"Of course."

"Then command me!"

"I want some one to enter the house inhabited by Lura, the woman with the leopard."

Boston seemed to recoil, but he soon recovered.

"Look at me, Captain Dan. I am known wherever I go. The man I robbed to-night could pick me out among all the crooks in the city. Who knows that I will not have the police looking for me before morning?"

"You won't, Boston. The contents of the letter will keep the man you plundered from looking for you. I know you are a marked man. I am aware that you have lost an eye and that one of your shoulders makes you a marked person in another direction. But, this service is in favor of the innocent. We are not striving to convict any but the guilty. If, as you say, the man you saw come down Epsom Tibbets's stairs at a certain hour that night is innocent, you will not hesitate to make that clear."

"I will go through fire to save him!"

"Then listen! I am going to the woman with the leopard. I am going to cross the dead line."

"You, Captain Dan?"

"I won't send you there, for you are a marked man, though Simon Sulks won't have you arrested for robbery. Some one must know that I have gone to this house. The secret must be shared by some one. Clova is too young to keep it and to understand the importance of the visit. Lura has lost her leopard."

"Lost it?" echoed Boston.

"It has been killed."

"In the street?"

"No, in her parlor. It was killed in her presence with the Modoc tomahawk which she treasures among her bric-a-brac. I am going to sell her another animal."

For a moment Boston Bilkins did not know whether to laugh or only to stare at the cool detective.

"Where will you get the beast?" he asked at last.

"Leave that to me. Look here! Here is something you haven't seen," and Dan took from an inner pocket a slip of newspaper, which he handed to Boston, who leaned forward and read it slowly:

"WANTED—A young leopard. Must be at least half-grown and docile. A good price will be paid for the right kind of animal. No person having any other pet will apply. Bring animal along if docile enough. No. 987 K—STREET."

"That's the house!" exclaimed Boston. "I guess Lura's lost the other one. Killed at home, you say? By its mistress?"

"No, by a man who saved his own life by getting out of the house at the right time. Now, Boston, the secret of my visit to this leopard queen is yours."

"When do you go?"

"Some time to-morrow."

"You will get her a leopard, will you?"

The ferret smiled.

"I'd agree to get her an elephant if she wanted one," he declared. "I must get beyond the doors of that house. I want to see this woman who is the friend of soft-handed Captain Tunis."

"You see something, I know you do. You have found a clew to the mystery of Madeline Meggs!"

The hand of Gilt-Edge Dan fell upon Boston's shoulder.

"Let the future speak for itself. We'll make it speak, Boston!" he said.

CHAPTER IX.

A PLAY BY CAPTAIN TUNIS.

If Epsom Tibbets had deserted his little office, where the mystery of Madeline Meggs had started, he was still in the business of fleecing those who came to him for loans.

He had simply opened another place some distance from the old one, and had installed himself therein, and was ready to catch as many flies as he could.

He was the sole occupant of the den the same night that witnessed the plundering of Simon Sulks by Boston Bilkins, ex-convict and the marked man, when a footstep came up the stair, and the old shark, looking up from his table, waited for the opening of his door.

He had been harassed almost to death by reporters, who wanted his repeated story about the mystery, and fearing that he was about to receive another visit from one of these gentry, he was frowning when the door opened.

In came a man of commanding presence, and the moment the old man caught sight of him, he shrank back in his seat and stared.

It was Captain Tunis slightly disguised, but Epsom Tibbets seemed to know him, for a smile suddenly appeared at the corners of the money-shark's mouth, and he waved his visitor to a chair.

"Well, how are you, Epsom?" said Captain Tunis, looking across the table at Tibbets.

"I'm pretty well, considering everything. You know the notoriety I have obtained within the last few days? I didn't seek it, but it was all the same. Meggs! Came to my office to be out of the way. She didn't consult my feelings at all, but died right there, much to my pecuniary loss."

"I'm sorry," said Captain Tunis, with mock sympathy. "I don't like to see you lose a dollar; never did, Tibbets. But, you don't know what they are doing with the case. I mean you don't know how the sharps are getting along with the mystery, so-called?"

"Don't know. All I ask is to be kept out of the matter from now on. I'm a quiet person, don't want any of this notoriety. Don't suit me at all."

Captain Tunis leaned across the table, and his dark eyes seemed to look Tibbets through.

"Who is the main sharp on the trail?" he asked.

"Dan Damon."

"Where does he live?"

"Just round the corner from my old office."

"He pumped you, I suppose?"

"Yes, several times. He is a sharp that I rather like, and I went to him as soon as I could get my breath, after the discovery of Meggs dead in the office."

Captain Tunis nodded as if he knew this,

which was not unlikely, for it had been brought out by the newspapers.

"You went to him, eh?"

"Yes."

"And he came home with you?"

"Came back and saw Meggs dead in my chair."

"Ahem! You seemed to think of him first?"

"Why not? I didn't want any one to think that I had a hand in it. I kill Meggs? Why should I?"

"She had diamonds with her, Tibbets."

"But I was about to get them, anyhow. She wanted a loan on the sparklers."

"Yes."

The dark hand of Captain Tunis twisted his mustache, and then his eyes looked away for a moment.

"So Dan Damon is still on the trail? I think I know him, and I wish him success."

There was no reply, but at that moment the eyes of the two men met, and did not look away for a full second.

"I used to know Meggs; that's why I called," said the captain at last. "I am naturally interested in the matter of her death. Old friend, you see."

The long, skeleton fingers of Tibbets drummed on the edge of his table, and he said:

"Why didn't Meggs go to him, captain?"

"In an instant the man with the waxed mustache was looking at the money-broker, and the two remained giving each other look for look for some time."

"Oh, she was a queer one all her life," Captain Tunis answered, at last. "She didn't care to go to him; probably she was afraid to."

"He would have taken her back."

"Maybe so."

"I think he would from what I know of him."

"He never comes to you, does he?"

"Never! Why should he, a millionaire, come to Epsom Tibbets?"

Captain Tunis suddenly averted his gaze and seemed to watch the fire that leaped and sputtered in the broker's grate.

"Well, maybe this sharp will find out who killed Meggs. I hope he will. I would like to see the mystery solved and if he is sharp enough he will do it."

"If any man can go to the bottom of this murder that one is Dan Damon."

"Eh? You think him a good one?"

"One of the very best!" assured Tibbets, with a glow of pride.

"But he'll drag you back into the game. He will make you appear in court and tell all you know."

"That's not much. I can't get more notoriety than I have got already. Of course I don't like it, but, then, I want to know who killed Meggs."

The man who listened seemed to shrug his shoulder and the next minute was standing erect, putting on his gloves.

Tibbets, looking up saw the eyes of Captain Tunis fastened upon him as if looking down into his very heart and all at once the hand of the blase Apollo fell upon his shoulder.

"I hope it won't tangle you in the mess," he said, with a grin. "I sincerely hope, Tibbets, that the trail won't get you into trouble."

"Gods! how can it?"

"You can't account for some things. You know that circumstantial evidence is sometimes the toughest kind to meet and overcome."

Tibbets suddenly turned pale.

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean?" he stammered.

"There! Don't fly from your chair, but keep your seat. I don't want to disturb your nightly dreams, but a man who has seen as much of the world as you have ought to see what I mean without asking such a question as that."

"But I don't unless you—"

"There! I think you are getting at it at last," interrupted Captain Tunis, with a grin. "I thought you hadn't a head as thick as a post."

Epsom Tibbets sat in his chair a picture of fright and terror. He tried to speak, but his tongue failed him and twice he attempted to get up, but could not.

"You don't mean that they might suspect me?" he managed to say at length.

"There's no telling what these detectives will do," answered the other with cool cruelty.

"They are merciless and sometimes hunt down a man known to them to be entirely innocent of wrong-doing, especially if the circumstances give them the slightest color for their action. Think, Tibbets. Meggs was killed in your office. She came to you, so you say, with a lot of diamonds and wanted a loan. She was alone in this office for ten minutes while you went out and posted a letter. You saw nothing suspicious. When you came back she was lying on the floor dead, stabbed with a dagger which, the doctors say, must have been wielded by some one behind her—by some one who stole into the room like a tiger."

Tibbets did not speak.

"Don't you see what all these circumstances might lead to? You have told several different stories about this crime, so the papers intimate."

"But it's all a lie! I stuck to the truth as well as I could though in my excitement and

nervousness I may have altered the story a little."

"That's it exactly. They will take advantage of this."

"But Dan Damon won't. The wonder-sharp is my friend as he told me—"

Captain Tunis interrupted Tibbets with a laugh.

These ferrets want a victim. They never like to be baffled altogether," he said. "They have been known to hang innocent men and if you will stop and look over the circumstances like a man—if you will look at things from a detective's stand-point—you may see what a fix you are really in."

"But, heavens! why should I touch Miggs?" cried Tibbets.

"You did not touch her—I believe that, Tibbets; but that isn't it. Look here. Within the last thirty days you have lost money. You have met with financial reverses which nearly swamp you."

Epsom Tibbets gasped and gave the speaker a deep look.

"What if they get hold of this?" continued Captain Tunis. "What if they consider this state of affairs as a motive? The man who killed Miggs was seen by no one, and yet there were scores of people on the street that night. You want to retrieve your failing fortunes. Why, if the truth was known, you had barely enough in your safe that night to accommodate Miggs."

"I had more than enough," said Tibbets. "I had three thousand there and she wanted but five hundred."

"But you have lost money. You went down into the curbstone market and the bull fatally gored you."

"I should have kept out of the swim, but, fool like, I thought I had a tip."

"Like other fools!" coolly supplemented Captain Tunis. "Now you are looking this thing in the face. You see what might be brought against the innocent."

There was no answer.

"I thought it my duty to come and say this, Tibbets. I don't like to see my friends in hot water. You are a good fellow, and we used to have times, but not in this city. You ought to get on your feet, and you will if they let you alone."

"That's it. If they let me alone I will get up and laugh at the men who fleece each other in the money markets. I could have made a raise if Miggs hadn't been killed. She would never have redeemed the diamonds."

"Perhaps not."

"She as good as said so. She almost told me that she would never come back with the five hundred."

Captain Tunis stepped toward the door.

"A word to the wise in a case of this kind ought to be sufficient," he went on, looking at the man at the table. "I thought you hadn't looked at the matter in its proper light. There is no telling what these sharps of the trail will unearth; but, should they fail to find the guilty, which they are not likely to do, they will look among the ranks of the innocent for a victim, and if they get hold of your needs that night—if they see that those diamonds would help you out of a snap, and put you once more on your feet—"

"Don't!" broke in the money-shark, springing up and putting out his hands. "You'll drive me mad. I've been nearly there a dozen times since Miggs died."

"All right. I wish you good-night, Tibbets. You can depend on me. The secret is safe while I carry it, but the trouble lies with those keen sharps of the sidewalk."

Standing like a man roused from a dream, Tibbets heard the feet of Captain Tunis go down his stairs.

"There's a good deal in this," he said. "There is more in it than I ever saw before. I didn't know he had discovered that I got pinched; but he knows nearly everything. The Gilt-Edge Sharp wouldn't stack the cards against me, even if he knew the facts; but there's no telling what the other ones might do. Captain Tunis is right. I can get up again if they'll only let me alone. But they won't do it here. No, they won't. I must go. I must fly. They sha'n't track me down. I'll vanish like the person who killed Miggs."

He hustled about, looking at the various papers in the desk, and the little safe in one corner of the new office. He fed the fire with some of these, with others he stuffed his pockets.

It took him nearly two hours to go through his effects.

He locked the door at last and stole down-stairs. Out on the street he turned and looked up at the window, and noticed that no light now shone there.

"It's 'good-day,' said Tibbets to himself. "This is getting away a good deal like a thief, but it's necessary."

Epsom Tibbets vanished like a shadow.

If he had looked back as he turned from the building he might have caught sight of a figure hidden by a lamp-post and when he hurried off he might have seen this same figure take after him with a bright, gleaming eye.

"I thought you'd go," assumed the man at Tibbets's heels. "I thought I knew my business. Now there will be fun among the ferrets of New York when they discover that you have sloped, Mr. Tibbets!"

The money shark with his hat pulled over his eyes kept on his way to the ferry.

Ten minutes later he boarded a train in the Jersey City depot and snuggling down in the darkest corner of the car, turned his collar up and waited impatiently for the start.

The man who had followed him to the car turned back when the heavy train lumbered out of the depot.

There was a smile on his face.

I know where the old fool is going. I can put them on his track at any time. He is in the toils and Dan Damon will want to know what has become of Tibbets. But the ferret has work of another kind on hand and is needed where it is."

Back to the city went the speaker and the lamps there revealed the waxed mustache of Captain Tunis.

CHAPTER X.

THE LEOPARD-SELLER.

It was ten o'clock on the day set apart by Gilt-Edge Dan for his visit to the woman who had lost the leopard and in the parlor of the house sat the beautiful creature known as Lura.

Hers was a type of beauty which would have fascinated any one. It was deep and lustrous and her dark eyes nestling beneath silken lashes of raven blackness, added to her looks and seemed to give color to the belief that she could, when necessary, be as soft and cooing as a dove.

Lura was quite alone.

The animal which had crouched at her feet on the Indian rug there no longer looked up into her eyes nor felt the hand she often lowered to smooth the spotted skin.

Cleo was dead. Cleo had fallen beneath the hasty hand of Jack Parsons; the tomahawk had dashed through skin and skull and the pet she loved was already rotting under ground.

The splendor by which she was surrounded told that she was one of the children of fortune, and while she appeared to be waiting for some one, the hands she exposed were seen to be laden with costly rings.

Suddenly the bell sent its rich tones through the house and a rustle of garments in the hall told Lura that the maid had gone to the door.

The maid soon came in and said something in low tones to her mistress.

"Admit him. He's the first and if he has what I want the others will get no further than the door."

A minute later there stepped into the parlor a man who looked but little like the shadower who had told Boston Bilkins that he would sell Lura a new leopard that very day.

The dark eyes of the woman in the handsome arm-chair encountered those of the man who had come and the scrutiny seemed to satisfy her.

He handed to her a card which she took and looked at for an instant.

"I have come in answer to your advertisement for a pet," explained the caller, whose name on the card told that he was "Burton Bryce, Jr.", and that he sometimes dealt in animals, though, as he hastened to assure Lura, he had no regular depot for the display of pets.

"I want a leopard," said Lura.

"Your first, madame?"

The eyes in Lura's head seemed to flash and her white hands were seen to shut.

"I had one," she answered, almost choking with anger. "I had a very fine female, but I have lost it."

"By sickness?"

"Yes, sudden sickness," and the woman glanced toward the shelves where, among other things, the Modoc tomahawk had lain.

"You want another leopard to take the place of the one you have lost?"

"That is it. You supply pets?"

"Sometimes. I have agents who look the city over for me, but I seldom come into the foreground, for it isn't a nice business for one who cares something for society, you know. There is money in it, but not that popularity which would give one the social standing that other callings do."

"I understand you, Mr. Bryce," returned the woman. "You deal in animals and go into society."

"Yes."

"Have you a leopard?"

"I think I can suit you, madame. I happen to have a very fine Ceylon leopard which is quite tame, but not so tame as to be effusive."

"That is what I want. I would not have an animal with too much purring and all that. I want a watchdog as well as a pet."

"I have such an animal."

"In the city?"

"In the city."

"I asked the persons who had a leopard to bring the beast with him, but you have not done so?"

"I could not and appear here during the day. I can bring her around after dark, or send my man with her, just as you request."

It seemed to Burton Bryce that the eyes of

the woman in the chair got a sudden, eager light.

"I would like to see the leopard," she confessed. "I need one to take Cleo's place and that as soon as I can get her."

"Did you call your pet Cleo?"

"I did, and she knew the name as well as though she could speak English."

"Was the sickness so sudden that no help could be obtained?"

Again Lura started.

"I might have saved her had I been a little quicker," she exclaimed. "Yes, I might have helped Cleo; but, I did not, nor did I even get to pay him back for what he did."

The leopard-seller did not seem to take notice of the last words, for he asked after the habits of the dead pet and Lura told him the full history, much to his joy, as he seemed to take great interest in it.

"Those Ceylon leopards are strong and dangerous. I know something about them," averred Lura. "I don't want one that will bite when she should lick. They like the smell of blood, but I don't object to that. In fact, I think it a good trait, for one doesn't know how soon one may need the teeth of the pet in self-defense."

"Exactly," assented Bryce. "I have seen these pets docile one minute and savage the next. It is all in their keeping, I think."

"That is true. I could have spoken to Cleo and she would have buried her teeth in the throat of my best friend."

"A pet worth having if one has an enemy," smiled the leopard-seller.

A sudden gleam lit up the depths of the dark eyes before him and Lura stretched out a fair hand.

"You may bring her around to-night. Bring her in person, if you please. Say, at seven."

"I will be here, madame," bowed Bryce, and the next moment he was moving across the floor.

"Is she caged?" asked Lura.

"No, she follows one like a spaniel, but I will bring her by carriage to the corner so as not to attract attention."

"A good idea. I think you know your business. You are very kind to have answered the advertisement in person. I will not bargain with any one else."

A minute afterward the man called Burton Bryce was out on the sidewalk and the red curtains at one side of Lura's room parted and a man stepped into the parlor.

"He's gone, has he?" asked this person, who was tall and good-looking. "He's a nice-looking fellow for a leopard-trader."

Lura showed her teeth in a smile.

"He doesn't sell them in person, only bargains with his customers; but, as you have heard, he has consented to bring me a successor to Cleo."

"They're sharp, these fellows are," observed the man. "They play some pretty hands sometimes."

"These leopard-sellers, you mean?"

He walked over to Lura's chair, and standing beside her for some time, gazed down into her upturned face as if he would read what she was thinking about.

"Do you really believe that he is a professional dealer in pets of the kind you want?" he asked.

"I see no reason to doubt it."

"You don't, eh? You see no reason to doubt the cunning story he had made up before he rung your bell. Well, I thought you had more penetration than that."

Color deserted the woman's face at this, and she appeared for a moment ready to spring up and grasp his arm.

"What do you mean?" she contented herself with saying. "You seem to hint at suspicion. I know these men aren't to be trusted—not all of them at any rate; but this one has a leopard; he will bring the beast around at seven, and if it suits me, I will take it."

The man laughed.

"That's all right as far as it goes," he went on. "I don't blame you for wanting a pet in Cleo's place, but you should have your eyes in your head when you bargain with a man like that. And then you should have killed the man who killed Cleo."

"I'll do that yet if you give me time!" cried Lura. "You know that I will soon have him where I want him, though he doesn't suspect it. But, what have you against the man who has just quitted this room? He is what he represents himself, isn't he? Isn't that man whose card lies yonder a dealer in pets?"

"No."

"What, then, is he?"

"You want the truth, and I'm glad I was here when he called, for if I had not been, you would be a dupe, and that man's at that. I have met him before. I stood face to face with him, and those eyes which I noticed at the time couldn't deceive me to-day."

"Heavens! where did you ever meet that man?" demanded Lura.

"I met him at Haskins's house. I encountered him in the library, and was introduced to him there."

The look of the leopard queen became a sud-

den stare, and for some time she seemed ready to dispute the revelation she had just heard as being preposterous—impossible.

"What took him to the house?" she asked. "He didn't want to sell Lot Haskins a pet, did he?"

"Bless you, no."

"You don't mean that he had business with the nabob?"

"Business of importance," and the speaker was watching Lura like a hawk. "I heard enough as I stood in the hall to give me a clew to what he wanted. No, he didn't want to sell Haskins a leopard, for he is a tiger himself, and in short, is on the trail which has mystified and excited the ferrets of New York."

Lura fell back in her chair, with every vestige of color fled from her cheeks, and her eyes staring in amazement at the man who was standing over her with the coolness of a fiend.

"You don't mean that he is one of them?" she almost gasped.

"I do. That man is one of the shrewdest detectives on earth. He can play leopard-seller to perfection, or he would not have deceived your sharp eyes."

Lura said nothing. She lay back in her chair, every now and then looking across the room, and every time with her teeth firm set, and her bloodless hands tight clasped.

"Look here," she suddenly exclaimed. "He will come again. This man will be back here at seven. He will come with a leopard."

"Do you think so? Don't you think he has carried out his play?—that he took this plan to get beyond the doors of this house?"

"You knew him. Why didn't you make it known? He didn't see you, nor suspect your presence. There was but a curtain between you and that man, and yet you withheld your hand."

"I know I did. I wanted to see how far he would carry his game. I watched him with a good deal of interest, I can tell you."

"He was in our power then."

"That may be true, but there's no telling with whom he left the secret of his coming to this house. You don't know all the cunning of these American Vidocqs. In all likelihood this man intrusted his play to some one's keeping before coming hither. He has a friend."

"You know this, then?"

"I know that Dan Damon has a friend, but whether he let her know of his call I can't say."

"A woman, then?"

"No, a little girl—a mere child, on whom he seems to dote."

"We can silence her if this man gets troublesome."

"He's that now," laughed the man.

Lura was silent for a moment.

"Don't you think he will come back at seven?" she asked.

"I don't know. I wouldn't be that man."

"But you will be here, then?"

"I can be here."

"You must come. In the mean time find out if any one shares the secret of his visits to me. That man a detective? That man a human bloodhound? Captain Tunis, if he is all this, he is the shadow that threatens our game. He is the man who may spoil the great play, and who, if he worms himself into Lot Haskins's confidence, may hurl me back from the threshold!"

"Ha, ha! I thought I could stir your blood," was the laughing reply.

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE ANNOUNCEMENT.

OLIVE HASKINS, the child of the millionaire, stood in the half-darkened parlor of the stately mansion of the avenue.

She was quite alone, but the deep look that she directed toward the door told that she was looking for some one.

It was late in the afternoon and the long shadows announced the approach of evening.

In the library across the hallway sat Haskins himself.

But the nabob was not alone. His companion was the evil genius of the fair girl's life, Captain Tunis, the man who had crossed her path and whom she feared as she would a serpent that glided from the forest to destroy.

She stood like one awaiting the announcement of some dread fate; her hands clutched the chair and she watched the door as if expecting to see it open at any moment.

"I know what is going on there," she said half aloud. "I am aware of the accursed bargain which that dark-faced man is driving with father. I am the stakes of the game he plays: I am the prize for which he is playing the cool hand. In God's name, can the story of the detective be true? Was Madeline Meggs my mother?"

She walked toward the door as if she would fling it open and crossing the hall, suddenly appear to the two men in the library; but she shrank from the portal and fell back to the middle of the room again.

Presently the opening of the front door startled her and running to the window she caught sight of the figure of Captain Tunis as it went down the steps.

"Gone, and I have not been confronted!" cried

Olive. "Has the bargain been made and sealed? I will see."

Summoning to her rescue the courage which she seemed to feel she needed, she left the room and crossed the hall.

In another moment she appeared suddenly to her father at his desk, his face still pale from Captain Tunis' visit and his eyes unnaturally bright.

Olive stopped near the door, but his voice invited her to come on.

"Don't you think the time has come for me to know something of what is going on?" said the beautiful girl as she halted by the desk and looked down into the upturned face.

He appeared to start.

"You keep me in the dark, or at least you think I am there," she went on. "I have ears and you must not blame me for using them in this house. I have ears and it is natural that I should use them when the man who has just departed is under the roof."

Lot Haskins did not speak.

"You must not expect this conspiracy to go on without my knowledge. If you are in the power of this person and have not the strength to break the cords, I will help you."

"In his power?" suddenly laughed Haskins. "How can I be in any one's power?"

"Something is wrong. Something is far from right."

"In what way?"

"Captain Tunis is a villain; he is a gloved scoundrel who is playing a game of his own and the happiness of this house is the target he deliberately aims at."

"My child, you must not impute such motives to Captain Tunis."

"But I do," cried Olive. "I do, I say. Who is he? Where he came from is a secret which he keeps to himself. Where did you first encounter him? What brought you two together?"

Haskins put up his hand and touched his daughter's sleeve.

"You should not ask such questions," he said.

"Perhaps Captain Tunis would object. Is that the reason? You have kept a terrible secret from me. You have kept from me the awful fact that my mother was not lost in the wreck of the Florida Belle on the Mississippi."

The millionaire of Gotham fell from Olive with a cry which was little more than a gasp.

"Who told you this?"

"Pardon me, my ears are the sinners. I could not help but overhear the conversation that passed between you and the detective who is trying to solve the mystery that enshrouds the death of Madeline Meggs."

"I did not think my own child would play the role of eavesdropper. No, I never dreamed of such a thing."

"I could not help it, I say," cried Olive. "The first words startled me. You did not deny the detective's statement."

Lot Haskins said nothing.

"It is true. She was my mother. Why didn't you ferret her out and bring her home?"

"Why didn't she come home?" he said.

"I don't know."

"Why didn't she come to my door and not go to a money shark and die there with the secret she carried in her bosom unsolved?"

Olive silently shook her head.

"You must have known that she was in the city? You could not help knowing it."

He looked away, avoiding the eyes that pierced him through and Olive saw his hands shake.

"But I can give you another mother," he said when he again encountered her gaze. "I can do this, Olive, and in her love you will forget the past and forgive your father."

Olive Haskins looked deep into the eyes before her and for a moment seemed on the point of throwing herself upon his bosom and asking his pardon.

"But you can't do this," she said. "You can't give me another mother. I would never forget that you let the real one die by the dagger of the unknown assassin—"

"There! I did not do that. Olive, I did not know that she was a hunted woman."

"But you knew she was near, yet after all these years of doubt and mystery, you did not stretch forth your hand, but held it back until it was too late, and even then you let them take her to the Potter's Field without giving me a chance to look into the eyes that first looked upon me."

The strong and handsome millionaire trembled.

"But, who is the new mother?" suddenly continued Olive. "Who is the woman who is to enter this house as its mistress?"

Lot Haskins lifted the lid of the desk and took out a photograph which he handed to Olive.

The girl saw the features of a handsome woman. She saw a beautiful face, deep, liquid eyes and a bust that would have entranced a painter.

"Is this the person you have chosen for my second mother?"

"Yes. You will learn to love her," said Haskins.

"Is she the friend of Captain Tunis?"

Olive saw him hesitate.

"Why do you hate this man?" he asked. "Why do you always think that his hand is in everything that threatens your happiness?"

"That is not the question. I asked you if this woman, your affianced, is acquainted with Captain Tunis?"

"They are acquainted—"

"Then she is not and can never be a friend of mine," and the picture fell upon the desk at Haskins's hand.

"Pish, girl. You show temper like your mother's," he laughed. "You may learn that I am master here. I will bring this lady to this house and when you come to know her you will ask a thousand pardons on your knees."

"Not to her. For her to know Captain Tunis is enough," cried Olive. "For her to be his friend is too much. They have thrown the net over you; they have drawn you into the web, for Captain Tunis is a scoundrel of the deepest dye and I say this with what I have heard in this house ringing in my ears."

"But you do not know what the future is. You may go too far in your resistance."

"I know that. When a man is in a web he don't know what he will not do to get out. What secret is this that binds you to Captain Tunis? What hold has this man with hidden claws upon you?"

The nabob looked up at his child and seemed to shrink from her penetrating eyes.

"For heaven's sake, cut loose from them now," continued Olive, bending forward and dropping her hand upon his shoulder. "For the love you once bore my mother and the affection you still show for me, break away from the conspiracy."

"What conspiracy?" he asked.

"Are you blind already?" cried Olive. "Have they bored out your eyes so early in the game? And you have promised to bring this woman home and proclaim her my new mother?"

"I have promised, and, what is more—I had intended telling you this very day—within three days she will be here."

A cry rose to the young girl's lips and she recoiled with her eyes fastened upon the man who filled the chair at the open desk.

"So soon? Have they progressed so well with the plot? And, what is darker still, you have given Captain Tunis your word that in time I shall become his wife."

There was no reply to this.

Lot Haskins looked up in stupid wonderment, and for several moments seemed to turn pale and speechless.

"I heard the bargain. I could not help it," Olive went on. "Why, you must be completely in the snare to make such accursed trades with this tiger in broadcloth. Who is he? What has he been? In what jungle did he first see the light?"

The millionaire smiled, but at the same time avoided the look that transfixed him.

"I refuse. I utterly refuse to carry out your part of the bargain with Captain Tunis."

"No, you must not," and the hand of Haskins closed on Olive's arm. "You must accede to it for my sake. I am your father and I must carry out the agreement."

"Without me, then," said Olive breaking away.

He turned and looked at her, then sprung up and threw himself between his daughter and the door.

"It must be done. You don't know where I am."

"I know enough. I know that you are in the web of the conspirators. I know that Captain Tunis has taken advantage of his connection with the plot to force you to give me to him. I know that this woman, called Lura, once had a leopard which a man had to kill before he could get out of the house."

"Who told you this?"

"The man who killed the beast."

"You must not desert me. Olive, for the sake of this house you must accede to my part of the compact."

"Which means that the detective will not be permitted to discover who killed Madeline Meggs, eh?"

Haskins staggered back like one shot.

"I refuse!" cried the girl who stood at the door her figure drawn up and her hand outstretched. "I utterly refuse to have a hand in this dark compact. I will not trifle with justice. I will not hold back from the trial of the bloody dagger the ferrets of New York. Captain Tunis must look elsewhere for a wife for I will never stand with him at the altar!"

The millionaire, biting his lips, went back to his chair and dived one hand into the desk.

"I regret to say that you are too late in your resolution. Here is a copy of the compact. The original is in other hands."

"In Captain Tunis's?" asked Olive.

"In other hands," repeated Haskins. "It is drawn, sealed and witnessed."

"You can throw it upon the fire and let it shrivel as the deeds of Captain Tunis and Lura, his friend, will shrivel in the searching light of justice. I repudiate every bargain you have made with these human vampires. I defy them to carry out that part of it which in any manner refers to me. I am your daughter, but I

am the child of Madeline Meggs, as well, and the ferret who is now on the trail shall have all the assistance I can give him."

"You mean Dan Damon?"

"The man who was here!" said Olive. "I will give him all the assistance I can. I will urge him not to turn from the trail till he has unearthened the murderer of Madeline Meggs, my mother."

"This may be a bad thing for the ferret," said Haskins, coldly.

"From what I know of him he is able to take care of himself," was the quick reply.

"This ferret should not go too fast."

"What, have you allied yourself on the side of crime and do you intend to baffle him if you can?"

"I have not said so; but Dan Damon must not interfere with me."

"If he interferes with Captain Tunis will that be obnoxious to you?"

There was no reply and Olive followed up her sentence.

"If he breaks the power of the plotters—if he discovers the hand that silenced Madeline Meggs—will you hate him?"

"But, he can't do that. This man-hunter, shrewd though he be, can't fight successfully the hand that stole in upon her in old Tibbets's den and took her life. Better let the dead rest in peace than attempt to fight a fate that cannot be vanquished."

"Never!"

Olive threw wide the door and stepped into the hall.

Once she turned and looked at her father, and ere the library portals shut she saw him drop limp and breathless into a chair and falling forward on the desk, bury his face in his arms.

"Is it too late?" she asked herself. "Is it too late to save him? He may be guilty of some dark crime; but, I don't believe it. The hand of Captain Tunis is at his throat, and he is to marry Lura, the Leopard Queen; he is to bring this cool, calculating, plotting creature to this house and I am to call her mother. Oh, Jack, Jack, where are you now?"

She passed up the broad staircase and stopped for a moment at the head of it to look down at the library door and shudder as if called by the Terror.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAP THAT WASN'T SPRUNG.

THE day waned.

The clocks of Gotham struck six and the long hands crept slowly around the dial.

In a handsome parlor of a house as good as its neighbors, and they were good ones, for they occupied a street well known to the up-towner, sat a woman who appeared to be listening for a sound that came not.

Ever and anon she looked at a bronzed Time that held up a swinging clock on the marbled mantel and turned toward the door that opened into the hall.

On one side of the room hung a red curtain which seemed to shut off an alcove, but in reality it hung between her and another apartment almost as large as the one she occupied.

The clock struck the half hour and then the last quarter.

"Not yet," said the woman in low tones. "Seven is the appointed time, but he shows no signs of being a little ahead of time."

She watched the swinging clock more than ever now, and when the last of the seven strokes had died away she turned toward the arras and said aloud:

"I guess you were right. At least he isn't here yet."

A low laugh came through the curtains and died away with the last word she had uttered.

Suddenly the bell tinkled and the watcher started up.

"He is here!" she said. "The man has come back to the trap. Now do your part."

This to no one in sight, but she knew that a man stood behind the curtain.

Lura, with eyes whose flashings she could not keep down, went into the hall and to the door.

Opening it, she fell back disappointed, for a man with a droop in his shoulder stood on the step, and a note appeared in his hand.

Clutching the paper, Lura came back to the little room, and sprung tigerishly toward the curtain, which she swept aside to face a man who looked for all the world like Captain Tunis.

"This is what I got," she cried. "A note, not a man. Here, help me read it," and she bent toward the light and read as follows:

"DEAR MADAME:

"I regret to say that my agent sold our last leopard without my knowledge; hence my inability to carry out my part of the bargain. Should we find another within the next few days, will let you know, or bring it to the house. We are sorry to disappoint you, as the Ceylon leopard was an exceedingly fine animal, and the act of our agent is deeply deplored.

Very truly yours,

BURTON BRYCE."

"Liar!" cried Lura, tearing to pieces the letter, and trampling them under foot. "He regrets nothing of the kind, for I believe now that he never had a leopard, and that you told the truth when you called him a human bloodhound."

You should have finished him when you had the chance."

Captain Tunis looked into Lura's face and simply smiled.

"What a fine chance had you," said he. "There lay the Moorish dagger and the Florentine stiletto. You let him get away."

"But I didn't know him," she cried. "I didn't know that he was a detective."

"Who brought the note?"

"A queer-looking man, who had a misshapen shoulder, and, so far as I could see, but one eye, though it may have had a mate."

"Did a man of that description bring it?" cried Captain Tunis.

"Yes. Do you know such a person?"

"He is the man who robbed Simon, my secretary. He is the man whom I have caught at my heels of late."

"Theu follow him!" and Lura pushed Captain Tunis toward the door. "That fellow will go back to Dan Damon, the ferret. He will return to his master. You have flushed the game!"

"How flushed it?" quietly asked the dark-faced man.

"I can't tell you. You were to watch the detective. You promised to find who shares his secrets, if he lets them out at all. You told me that he has a little friend who is but a child—that she has the key to his office, and that she comes from a rookery in the neighborhood, to warm by his fire."

"That is true."

"Aro you sure she has a key?"

"I know she has, for I have seen her open the door."

"But follow the man with the fallen shoulder. You say you have had him on your track. Who is he?"

"An escaped or pardoned convict."

"A man under obligations to Damon?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe he fears the ferret and serves him on that account."

"That is immaterial. But I knew the ferret wouldn't come back with the leopard. He wanted to get a good look at you and he had it."

Lura looked at Captain Tunis a moment, and then went back to her chair.

"I don't see that I need follow this deformed man home. I know where he lives," said the captain. "I can put my hands on him at any time. Simon was foolish to let himself be robbed, and you could have intrusted the letter to some other person."

"There was nothing in it," Lura hastened to say. "You should know that if it had been very important I should have carried it myself. By the way, who is this man of yours?"

"My secretary?"

"Yes."

"Simon Sulks," said Captain Tunis, with a faint smile.

"I know that; but his family?"

"I guess he never had any."

"Come," cried Lura. "I don't want any badinage of this sort. I want to know where you picked up this young man?"

"I found him three years ago in Tangiers."

"I thought he was an American."

"He is. He got stranded there, and I brought him home. What makes you take such an interest in him?"

"I don't take an interest in him. He has such keen eyes in his head that I could not help asking after him."

"He's harmless," laughed Captain Tunis.

"And secretive?"

"Yes. He never gave anything away in all his life, not even a penny to a beggar."

Meantime, the man who had delivered the note to Lura had turned several corners, and was in a small room where a man had waited for him.

"Well, I'm back, and the claws didn't draw blood," he smiled, taking a seat in front of the other.

"Did she take it in person?"

"Yes."

"Then it was Lura who answered the ring?"

"She opened the door herself."

Gilt-Edge Dan broke out in a light laugh.

"I wasn't deceived. The man I saw just before sundown—the one who appeared to be so careless—was playing his part of the game. I was seen and recognized by Captain Tunis, and somehow or other, he knew that I promised to come back to Lura's house with a leopard. I would give a good deal to have seen the trap they set for me."

"It was a dangerous if Captain Tunis had the setting of it," said Boston.

"And dangerous, too, if she manipulated the trigger, eh, Boston?"

"Deadly."

"Then I am to be congratulated, I suppose."

The one eye in the ex-convict's head glittered like a malevolent star.

"They were waiting for you," said he. "If you had gone there with a dozen leopards the trap would have been sprung. They were ready for you. Captain Dan—"

A quick footstep landed at the door outside and the next moment it opened to reveal in the light the sylph-like figure and white face of Olive Haskins.

"Jehosaphat! the nabob's daughter!" cried Boston Bilkins, shrinking from the girl as she came in, and then gliding toward the door with a quick look passing between him and the detective.

Olive did not seem to see the ex-convict until he was about to quit the room when she caught sight of his face and then, showing new emotion, she turned toward him and cried:

"I have seen that man. I have caught him of late about our house. I have called him 'the man outside.' I remember the one eye and the fallen shoulder. Is he your friend, Captain Damon?"

Boston had stopped and from a point near the door was staring at Olive whom he seemed to regard in the light of a strange and unwelcome intruder.

"We are friends," said Gilt-Edge Dan. "Shut the door and remain a moment, Boston."

The deformed obeyed and came back toward the table, watched by Olive whose look seemed to have changed from anger to pity.

He dropped into his old chair with a tremor and waited for her to continue.

"May I speak freely in his presence?" she asked.

"No, I don't want to hear!" cried the jail-bird putting out his hand and rising. "I won't listen to what the young lady has to say. I prefer to go."

"What does he mean? I don't intend to accuse him of anything. I thought that perhaps, as he has hung around the house he may tell me something about my father's callers."

"I could, but I'd rather not," said the cripple.

"Hear him," and Olive turned fully upon the detective whom she approached.

"I am in a sea of trouble," she went on. "I could not remain at home with the secret I have wormed from my father. I fear I have been followed, for twice I had reason to think so since quitting the house. I might have sent Jack as I did the other time, but I dared not trust him with the secret. You know that I overheard father confess that the woman called Madeline Meggs was my mother."

"Parsons told me so," said Gilt-Edge Dan.

"Well, that secret has had a strange influence on my life. It was so terribly strange that I seem to be in a dreadful dream. Madeline Meggs my mother and murdered within a mile of my luxurious home!"

"That's a fact," declared the ex-convict.

"But, this is not the secret that brought me from home at this hour," continued Olive. "The one I carry in my bosom is, to me, almost as terrible as the crime of the old money-shark's den."

Olive did not see the figure of Boston Bilkins quit the chair and in his eagerness lean toward her with his glowing eye fastened upon her with all the intensity it could assume.

The face of the jail-bird was white.

Gilt-Edge Dan waited for the millionaire's child to get her breath and proceed.

"I confronted him in the library. I came upon him just after Captain Tunis had departed. I drew the secret from him and it is this: My father is to become the husband of Lura, the woman—the Leopard Queen—of K— street."

A loud cry arose to Boston Bilkins's lips.

"Never! By heavens! I'll kill her first!" he cried.

Olive turned and looked into the convict's face.

"Is this man crazy, Captain Damon?" she asked.

Gilt-Edge Dan shook his head.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLUNDERED.

BOSTON BILKINS slunk from Olive's gaze and reached the door again.

This time he was not restrained, and in another moment he stood on the stairway, outside, with a singular gleam in his eyes, and his hands shut hard.

"No, I am not crazy, but talk of that sort will send me there. I can't stay and hear her give away such secrets. What, going to marry Lura, the Leopard Woman? Is he that deep in the snare? Have they hoodwinked him so completely? Can't the cords be broken?"

The jail-bird walked from the house, but a few steps away, stopped and looked back at it.

"She thought she was followed when she came to see Gilt-Edge Dan. She said she saw a man on her track? I will see about this."

Placing himself among the shadows of the buildings, Boston waited for Olive to emerge from the detective's lodgings, and when her figure was seen he leaned forward in his eagerness and watched it closely.

"I'll see who is watching her," he said under his breath. "If the girl has been tracked I will know something about it, for if the plotters are trying to enmesh her, they will hear from the man with the prison record."

He smiled as he spoke, and in another moment was following Olive as she moved down the street.

Presently, from the dark shadow of a house a figure came into view and followed the millionaire's daughter.

"She was right. It is after her now!" he said.

Olive, looking back now and then, did not catch sight of the gliding form, but she seemed to walk in the shadow of fear, and at last as she turned down the street leading to her home, the watcher drew off, content with having followed her almost to her own roof.

All this time the keen watchful eye of Boston Bilkins had not for a second lost sight of the man on the girl's trail.

Now and then he had caught a good view of him in the lights he could not avoid, and a sudden start on the watcher's part told him that the man was not altogether unknown to him.

Boston waited for the tracker to turn back.

"He will go to his master and report," he decided. "He will tell how Olive went to the ferret's and consulted him. He will go to the man whom he serves, and tell him all about this bit of detective work by himself. We'll see."

Back over the trail which Olive had unconsciously made for the man who had been at her heels went Boston, his eye shining in his head, and his hands eager to clutch the throat he thought he had clutched before.

The man, who was rather short of stature, turned into a street at last, and unlocked a certain door with a night key.

"Got home, eh?" said Boston. "I would like to see the inside of that house myself. Are you going to remain there, Simon Sulks?"

His question was answered sooner than he expected, for the door opened again and he saw the man he had tracked come out and walk away.

"Go! I guess I'll stay," said the jail-bird. "You may find the master elsewhere, and you know where to look for him."

Simon vanished, but the man from Sing Sing did not follow him again.

Ten minutes later Boston Bilkins stood in a darkened room with a smile of triumph on his face.

The one eye seemed to shine with more luster than ever, and his hand, opening one door after another, enabled him to creep from room to room with the skill of the experienced burglar.

"This is the den I have been wanting to visit for some time, or ever since I first set eyes on you, Captain Tunis," he said aloud. "I want to know what you have here and just how you are fixed."

In course of time he found himself in a large room supplied with two desks, and on one of them lay a piece of paper which was revealed by the little bluish flame that burned above it.

Boston opened the note and read it.

"I thought so," he muttered. "Simon left this for his master in case he came home before he found him. It tells me just what I thought—that the private secretary followed Olive at Captain Tunis's command. I see through the plot now."

The man who had been sent to prison for burglary had not come to Captain Tunis's house unprepared to get into desks and drawers if necessary.

He went to work with vim, and in a short time had ransacked several of the latter, besides opening the desk at which Simon Sulks worked when not on the street.

It was getting rather late when he sat down before the large desk in the corner.

"I want to see what is in here. This is the strong box of the den. This belongs to Captain Tunis himself and I must see beneath its lid."

There was no safe in the room, nothing but the desk which seemed to hold the very secret the jail-bird was after, and for some time he worked on the lock which seemed determined to resist his every advance.

"What if I should be seen?" he suddenly asked himself. "What if the arch-fiend himself should look in and catch sight of me?"

He took out his handkerchief and making a hole for his single eye, he tied it over his face and went back to his work.

At last the stubborn desk yielded.

For a moment after opening it Boston Bilkins fell back and rested.

He had turned on the gas a little more and did not seem to fear intrusion now.

Leaning over the desk which seemed to be filled with papers he began to ransack it.

Package after package he drew out and examined.

The one eye let nothing escape it. It seemed to ferret out the most remote secrets of that desk.

All at once the burglar raised his head and turned toward the door behind him.

His quick ears had caught the sound of a step and as he sprung up he saw a figure stop on the threshold and stare at him with the half-choked cry of a person suddenly surprised.

Boston Bilkins darted from the chair, overturning it, and before the person who had surprised him could move he had leaped across the floor like a lion and fell upon him with the fury of that king of beasts.

Nothing was said, for the quick hands of the deformed had forced the intruder against the wall and were holding him there with all their powers.

Simon Sulks had come back. Simon had re-

turned to discover an intruder in his master's house and a cold sweat stole out on his forehead when he saw but the one eye gleaming out from behind the handkerchief.

He realized that he was again in the grip of the person who had held him up on the street and deliberately plundered him of the note Lura had intrusted to his care.

Boston did not speak, but held Simon against the door while he glared at him with the fury of a wild beast.

The private secretary, feeling the cold fingers sinking into his windpipe, tried to beg for air, but his prayers were not heeded for some time.

"Where does he keep them?" suddenly asked Boston, releasing the terrified Simon as he dragged him half-way across the room and thrust him into a chair near one of the desks.

The white-faced man gasped for breath.

"Come! I can't wait here all night for a little information. I want to know where he keeps 'em."

"Where—he—keeps—what?"

"The really private papers—the ones he brought with him to this city."

Simon shook his head.

"You don't know, eh? You don't know and yet you are his private secretary. Come! no lies," and the hands of Boston flew again to the wretch's throat.

Simon thought he was gone this time without hope and with a vain effort to twist from the grasp of the one-eyed, he fell back in the chair and gave up all hopes of living through the ordeal.

"What if I've given it to him a little too hard?" said Boston as he drew off and for a moment looked at his work. "I don't want to overdo it, but if I have, why, I am safe, for dead men tell no tales."

Simon moved not. With the dark face of a man choked into unconsciousness he filled the chair while Boston, after feeling the pulse a second, went back to the desk he had left when Simon made his appearance.

He worked now like a man who must accomplish something within a given time. His hands ran everywhere through the contents of the desk and at last with a muttered curse he turned to the man in the chair and saw him move.

"You know where they are!" he cried, darting in front of Simon Sulks. "You aren't here for nothing and you know where he hides those papers."

"He carries them with him," Simon managed to articulate.

"He does nothing of the kind. He's no fool, Captain Tunis ain't, and you know where they are."

"I know you. You robbed me before."

"And got nothing!" exclaimed the disgusted Boston. "Yes, I had the honor to plunder you and you got off very well. But the papers? You can't hold me here till Captain Tunis comes home. That's your game, but it won't work, Mr. Sulks."

Simon felt the hands of the one-eyed again at his throat and he looked into the single optic and saw no mercy there.

"You don't want to apply to Saint Peter for admision to-night, do you?" cried Boston. "You're not in the proper frame of spirit to go up there and knock for admittance. I give you a minute."

"Give me air!" Simon gasped.

The next moment he had staggered to his feet and was standing before the jail-bird who looked at him, but ready at a moment's notice to spring forward and once more clutch his throat.

Simon went across the room. He had a wild look and his hands trembled.

Boston Bilkins followed him with the tread of a tiger and with the blazing eyes of one as well.

Simon stopped in front of a certain spot in the wall and looked over his shoulder as if to see whether the man who had captured him was near.

At length one hand of the terrified man went up and the fingers touched the wall.

In another second a door, till then concealed, opened; Boston, with a slight cry, went forward and looked into the place thus revealed.

"This is no water haul," he said to himself. "I have found Captain Tunis's treasure!"

Simon drew from the hole in the wall a packet which he seemed reluctant to let slip from his grasp.

The hand of the convict came over his shoulder and seized it.

"Is this all?" asked Boston. "I see the place is empty."

"That is all. That is the packet which Captain Tunis guards with so much care."

The jail-bird went back and saw the little door in the wall close again.

Simon stood there with his eyes riveted upon the man who had robbed Captain Tunis.

"I know what you are thinking about," said Boston, with a smile which Simon did not see.

"You think you and the captain will get even with me for this. All right! I'm willing. Good-night, Mr. Sulks!"

There was no reply, as if Simon disdained to answer the speaker, and as the figure of Boston

vanished into the hall he fell forward and with a gasp sunk into the depths of Captain Tunis's chair.

There he sat till he was jerked almost erect, and with eyes that seemed to fly from his head he looked into the mad face and orbs of his master.

"What has happened?" cried Captain Tunis.

"We've been robbed!"

"I see the desks have been plundered. But, the papers in the wall—the ones you copied? They are safe?"

There was no answer and Simon watched Captain Tunis cross the carpet to the secret place.

The man touched the button and the door opened.

In another instant he whirled upon the white-faced Simon with a curse of rage.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAIL OF THE DEAD.

LOT HASKINS, the nabob, was in earnest when he told Olive, his child, that within the next three days he would be the husband of Lura, the Leopard Queen.

The millionaire who had carried in his bosom the secret of the identity of Madeline Miggs was in toils of the darkest kind.

Olive now knew what the frequent absences from the mansion meant.

There had been many of them within the last six months.

He had been drawn into the snare set for him by Captain Tunis and Lura and the coming marriage was the consummation of the plotting.

The man of wealth sat in the library the same night of the events we have just witnessed, and alone.

This time Captain Tunis, his evil shadow, was not with him, and Olive, who had come back from her visit to Gilt-Edge Dan, was not leaning over the bannisters watching him with eyes of pity as she had done of late.

Lot Haskins knew that the secret was out; that Olive knew that the woman killed in Epsom Tibbets's office was her mother, and that in some way he was in the toils which were being made for him by Captain Tunis and his companion.

All at once the millionaire sprung from his seat and went to a small table in one corner of the library.

Lifting a curtain that hung above the table, he displayed some shelves from one of which he took a bottle and a graduating glass.

With these clutched in his hand, he came back to his chair and looked over his shoulder toward the door.

If he thought he had heard a sound there, he was not mistaken, for the portal opened and Jack Parsons came in.

In a flash the bottle fell between his legs and was adroitly caught there, while he turned to Jack, who was the private messenger of the mansion, and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, as Jack looked down at him, saying nothing.

"I am going away," was the reply.

Haskins said nothing.

"I am going off, I say," continued Jack. "I don't like this city."

"Oh, you are going out of the city, are you?"

"Yes."

Lot Haskins seemed to take a long breath.

"What's happened to drive you off?" he asked.

"Nothing much," answered the young man with a smile, as he watched the play of eagerness in the millionaire's eyes.

"You want your last check, then?"

"If you please."

Perhaps Jack wondered why all this coolness on Haskins's part, but he said nothing more.

The nabob turned to the table and took a check-book from his pocket.

"How much is back?" he quietly asked.

"Two months."

The pen went back and forth over the tinted paper, and the check was torn from the book and handed over his shoulder.

Jack watched the hand that extended the paper and seemed to see that it shook.

"Good-by. I wish you all manner of happiness," he said, falling back.

"Same to you," was the reply.

Only this and nothing more!

The very coolness of the man he had served for more than two years perplexed and mystified Parsons.

"You are going out of the city, you say?" said Haskins, as Jack paused at the door and looked over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"Are you going far?"

A queer light leaped up into the eyes that regarded Haskins.

"I'm going to look for a man," he said.

"Hal going to look for a man, eh? He may be hard to find."

"Perhaps, but I am prepared for that. I am going to look for Gilbert Haskins."

The millionaire stared at Parsons like a man suddenly confronted by the dead.

"For Gilbert Haskins?" he cried.

"Yes. I can't find him in this house and perhaps not in this city, therefore I am going off."

The look did not decrease in intensity, but on

the contrary seemed to grow in interest and wonder.

"I am going to find this brother of yours. I shall not give up until I have unearthed Gilbert Haskins."

"Why do you want to find him, saying, of course, that such a man ever existed?"

"What, do you deny that he ever lived?" and Parsons crossed the carpet and stopped beside the figure in the chair. "Do you deny that your brother Gilbert may not be living somewhere now and that the fortune which you own is not all yours by right?"

"By heavens! this is coolness without a parallel."

"Just as you think."

"When did you turn blackmailer?" cried Haskins.

"When you turned murderer!" said Parsons.

There was a cry which the man above the chair did not seem to comprehend, and the face of Haskins, growing white again, fell forward and something that had the sound of shattered glass seemed to land at his feet on the floor.

Jack looked down and saw particles of glass at the nabob's feet and he knew that something had fallen, and striking the foot of the chair had broken there.

"This is more than insolence," said Haskins. "I have given you shelter for more than two years. I have trusted you. I have given you one of the easiest jobs in the city, yet you repay me in this manner. You ought to go up."

"And where ought you to go?" grinned Jack, looking steadily at the speaker.

There was no answer.

"You know there are listening ears in this house," continued Haskins.

"Why shouldn't there be after the game that is going on?"

"You have poisoned the mind of my child."

Jack Parsons laughed.

"And you have sold her to Captain Tunis?" he said.

There was another start on the nabob's part and he did not reply for a full second.

"You are going to look for one Gilbert Haskins, you say? Do you expect to find him?"

"Why not?" asked Jack. "Why shouldn't a good hunt unearth this man? If he isn't dead, he ought to be turned up."

"Look here. You are like all men. You are playing a game of your own. This is a shrewd trick to rake in some cash. I don't blame you very much for you may need it. How much?"

With the look of a modern Satan Haskins wheeled his chair to the table and caught up the check-book.

"How much do you want for present needs?" he asked.

Jack Parsons seemed to go toward him.

"You seem to think that book potent in every thing," he said, his eyes fastened on the pen poised above the check-book. "You can keep your money. You have given me all I am entitled to and I don't want another cent of yours."

"Not. You're a queer one, Jack Parsons. But look here. You are going out of this house with a threat. Do you know that?"

"I have said that I expect to find one Gilbert Haskins, missing these twenty years. Is that a threat?"

"You know what it is as well as I do."

"This man, Gilbert Haskins, went to prison. He was sent up for a long term. He was your brother and it is said that he died there."

"Look here."

The millionaire pulled from a desk within his reach a folded newspaper, but Jack pushed it away as it was handed to him.

"I know what is in that paper. It contains all we ever heard of Gilbert Haskins's end at the prison. I know it says that he was burnt to death in an attempted revolt by the convicts. But you don't believe that, do you?"

"I do. He is dead, but if you want to look for a dead man all right."

There was a gleam of derision in the millionaire's eyes and he tossed the unopened paper back into the desk.

"You must not attempt to blackmail me," he said with a dark look at Parsons.

"When I do you may send me up the river."

"You are leaving me for a purpose."

"I am."

"You dare not tell me what it is."

"I dare tell you the truth. I am going to save, if possible, Olive, your child, from the web of doom. I shall try to expose the plot against both of you and, in the end, beat this Captain Tunis, who deserves the hempen necktie."

"Anything else?"

"That will be victory enough. The other matter—the mystery of the death of Madeline Miggs—will be cleared up by the keen ferret now on that trail."

Lot Haskins broke out in a sudden laugh.

"There may be two failures," he cried. "You have undertaken a Herculean task. You can't beat the game."

"We shall see."

Once more the tall figure of Jack Parsons stood at the door and Haskins was looking at him as he had never looked at him before.

"Why do you connect the death of Madeline Miggs with your purpose?" he asked, curiously.

"Because they seem to run together. That woman was your wife and Gilbert Haskins your brother."

"You don't intimate that I had a hand in the death of Madeline, do you?"

"That is for the detective. I am looking for Gilbert Haskins."

"Then, by heavens! you need not look far. The man is dead. He was buried in the prison, and his remains were fully identified. The books there will satisfy you."

There was a look, but no answer, and the door closed.

"This man is cool and determined. He is the person who has poisoned Olive against Captain Tunis. He has been harbored here too long, and now he goes away, to my unutterable joy. Going to look for the dead, eh? I wish him success. I will steer him to the spot where his man lies. I will even show him the grave of the black sheep of the Haskins family."

The millionaire caught sight of the shattered glass at his feet.

"There's more where that came from!" he exclaimed. "No wonder I let it fall. He gave me a sudden shock, but now that he has unmasked himself, I am prepared. I wish Captain Tunis would come. Olive has revolted, but we will bring her around. Lura will soon be here, and then—then let the detective play his hand if he dare!"

Jack Parsons had reached the little room he had occupied so long.

In the act of crossing the threshold he was startled by a step, and the next moment he stood face to face with Olive.

"You heard all, Olive?" he said.

"Yes, I approve. Do you know that I have the darkest fears concerning my mother's death? You may not find Gilbert Haskins, for he is in all likelihood dead; but you must help Dan Damon clear up the mystery concerning the murder of Madeline Miggs. The hand that took her life shall suffer for the crime. It was so sudden, so dark, that I shudder when I think of it. I never knew that mother's love, and yet she was near me in this very city!"

Half an hour later Jack Parsons, with the few things he desired to carry from the nabob's mansion, was on the street, and at his heels stalked a shadow that had seen him quit the house, and which followed him while he flitted from the place on his strange mission of unearthing Gilbert Haskins.

And in the library, alone, but watching the door with eyes that seemed to blaze with eagerness, sat the man in the web, and when the portal finally opened, and he caught sight of the person who came in, he sprung up and cried out:

"Why didn't you come sooner? Jack Parsons has deserted my service and turned tricker."

"Turned tracker, has he? Don't let that trouble you. I can check him whenever I want to," and the speaker, who was Captain Tunis, came forward and dropped into one of the chairs.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAN OUTSIDE.

The flight of Epsom Tibbets was not one of the things which were to be kept from Gilt-Edge Dan, the ferret.

That person discovered it almost as soon as the cunning Captain Tunis, and while the old money-broker thought he was flying from the keenest eyes in the city, he was, in fact, only making a trail, which, in time, would run him down, and get him into additional trouble.

But Dan Damon did not follow the money shark, but turned his attention to the real plotters in the game, and soon after Olive's visit to his lodgings he might have been seen in that part of the city where the murder of Madeline Miggs occurred.

The crime was as mysterious as ever to the general public, but the detective had strong hopes of finding a solid clew, despite the fact that none were seen on the surface.

He made his way to the office occupied by Tibbets that eventful night, and found the room as empty as when the old broker, dreading to remain in such a place, fled to other quarters.

A good many people had climbed those steps to get money from the old man, and he carried in his bosom some secrets which might have put certain people in an unpleasant light before the world.

Gilt-Edge Dan stood in the little room littered with a good many scraps of paper, which Tibbets had left behind, and he was soon looking over them with cool head, and steady hands.

But the hunt seemed to give him no clew to anything, for at last, with a smile to himself, the ferret arose and went to the door.

He was about to open it when it was opened for him, and he fell back from a face which looked into his with hardly a foot between them.

"What is it, madam?" asked Gilt-Edge Dan, seeing how confused the caller was.

"What, isn't he here any more? I thought this was where he did business—"

"Mr. Tibbets?"

"Yes, Tibbets, the broker."

"He has sought other quarters. He didn't like the notoriety he was getting by the death of his would be client, and so he has changed his place."

There was a stare in the eyes that looked into the ferret's, and he saw that he was telling something the speaker did not comprehend.

She was a small woman with a graceful figure, and a peaked face which for all its peakedness was not unhandsome.

"What happened to his client?" she asked.

"Don't you know, madam?"

"Indeed, I do not. I have just arrived, and this is my first stopping-place."

"You knew Epsom Tibbets, then?"

She smiled.

"I ought to. I am his wife!"

Gilt-Edge Dan could not suppress a laugh.

He never heard the old man refer to any marital experience, and to hear a strange woman say that she was his wife was enough to provoke more than a smile.

She seemed so interested in the flight of the old money shark that she came in without bidding and shut the door behind her.

"This was his den. I can see that by the way things are scattered over the floor," she went on. "Yes, I am Epsom Tibbets's wife, though I suppose he wouldn't own it in society, that is if he ever went into it, which I seriously doubt. He wasn't looking for me and maybe he got wind of my coming and put off."

"Then, you don't know that a woman was killed in this office," said Dan.

"In this den? While he occupied it? A woman killed in Epsom Tibbets's office? I hope no one suspects him of killing her."

"I don't think they do, but you see there is so much mystery about the crime that—"

"That he might find himself in a bad scrape? Is that it?" she cried.

"That's it."

"But I know the man. He never hurt any one. He was too cowardly. Why, I could frighten him by lifting my little finger. Epsom Tibbets take human life? He never would kill a cat!"

The little woman quieted down at last and Gilt-Edge Dan said:

"When did you first meet Tibbets?"

She looked at him like a person suddenly offended.

"I want to know to whom I am talking first. I don't want to get into the papers, for sooner than do so I will seal my lips and the world can wait till doomsday for what I know about Epsom Tibbets."

"But you might be helping justice and thus assisting a man who is in trouble—"

"I don't care about helping him particularly!" she exclaimed. "I don't care how much he suffers so they don't string him up for this crime which I knew he never committed from what I know of the man. I can't say that I'm proud of being known as Mrs. Tibbets, but I wanted to see him again."

"And so you came all the way from—"

"New Orleans," said the woman, unconsciously falling into the trap set for her by the detective.

"Yes, I knew he was from the South. He used to tell me about it and sometimes about one Madeline Miggs—"

"That's it. I don't wonder that he talked about her. You see she used to live in the South and it was said that Tibbets had his eye on her at one time, but she took up with a rich Northerner and captured the prize."

"To be lost on the river afterward in a steamboat explosion."

Little Mrs. Tibbets ran her peaked face almost into the detective's and gave him a penetrating look.

"Who said she was lost?" she cried. "Who said Madeline Miggs was lost that time?"

"Your husband was of that opinion for some years."

"He was, eh?"

"He believed it till one night Madeline came to him as large as life."

"Came to this office?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The night of the twenty-seventh."

"Heavens! you don't say!"

"She was killed here that night."

A little shriek parted Mrs. Tibbets's lips and she fell back from the ferret's look.

"You don't tell me that! Madeline Miggs killed in my husband's office? Who did it? Not Tibbets. He wouldn't drown a kitten."

"It isn't known who killed the woman," said the shadow. "She was followed to this place. She was found yonder on the floor by your husband when he came back from mailing a letter."

The woman gazed at the spot designated by the outstretched hand of the detective and from underneath his brows Gilt-Edge Dan watched her narrowly.

"This woman has a secret," he said to himself. "She came to New York on no unimportant errand. She must not get out of my hands."

"I would just like to see Tibbets," she suddenly resumed. "He wouldn't like to see me so

well, but I wouldn't bother him very long. I can't get over this killing in his office. Madeline Meggs was the victim, was she?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems strange that this news should be the first to shock me when I reach the city. Do you know that Madeline Meggs needn't have come here for money?"

"Your husband said she had diamonds with her—"

"Yes, the Franco diamonds—the ones she received from her husband, Lot Haskins, the night she married him," cried Mrs. Tibbets.

"You've seen them?"

"A hundred times."

"They were enough to keep her from want?"

"They were worth a king's ransom."

"Well, the person who killed her took them."

"What! took those diamonds?" exclaimed Mrs. Tibbets.

"Yes, carried them off. In a little while they would have fallen into your husband's hands."

"And have remained there, or at least they would never have gone back to their original owner. Epsom Tibbets was diamond mad."

"He was fond of the sparklers, then?"

"He was diamond mad, I tell you. But what am I saying? I don't want to get him into trouble. The sight of a diamond nearly turned his head. The night after Madeline was married an attempt was made to steal those diamonds."

"An attempt by Epsom Tibbets," said the detective, looking Mrs. Tibbets in the eye.

The lips shut hard and not a word escaped them.

"I tell nothing," she said at last. "I won't say who tried to steal those diamonds. Three were lost, for the thief actually got possession of the jewels, though he didn't keep them long. They caught a man for the act and sent him to prison."

"They did, eh?"

"That man was Lot Haskins's brother."

"The brother of the bridegroom?"

"Yea. Lot was as haughty as he was rich. He helped his brother over the road. He did all he could to send Gilbert Haskins to the Penitentiary, though I believe he knew he was innocent of the theft."

"Which Epsom Tibbets committed?"

Again the lips met, and the deep-seated little eyes of jet spoke what the tongue was guarding so well.

"What became of this man, Gilbert Haskins?" asked Gilt-Edge Dan.

"I never saw him after the day they took him off."

"Did the bride, Madeline, testify against him?"

"Yes. She swore she saw the thief in the moonlight, and she said that he looked like her husband's brother."

"And Gilbert? What did he do?"

"Nothing but sulk in the prisoner's box and look daggers at the pair."

"Didn't he try to establish his innocence?"

"No. He hardly lifted his hand in that direction. But when they had sentenced him he rose in his seat, and turning to Madeline, said so we all heard him: 'This is your day, madame! Mine will come, though years may intervene! By the living God, the hand of Gilbert Haskins will yet avenge this day!' He said that before the sheriff could seize him, and that ended it."

Little Miss Tibbets looked toward the window, and seemed to catch sight of a face there.

"Look! We are watched!" she cried. "Where does that window lead one to?"

"To a roof outside. This is the last office along the hall."

"It is gone now. But I saw it. It was pressed against the pane, and looked as I saw it last, with one terrible exception, for I could not forget the Haskins mouth. He was there—at that window!"

"Not the man you have been telling me about?"

"He was there! I saw the face of the man who was innocent—Gilbert Haskins of Louisiana."

Gilt-Edge Dan bounded across the torn carpet and landed at the sash.

The light of another building was shining on the roof beneath the window and he looked with all eyes expecting to see some one drop over the eaves, but his look was rewarded by nothing.

"I tell you Gilbert Haskins still lives," Mrs. Tibbets went on. "I never did believe that he was burned to death the time the convicts revolted and set fire to the prison. We always thought that he would carry out his revenge on Madeline and now that he was yonder at that window a moment ago, I am convinced that he did not forget his oath."

She went to the door but was caught by the detective who followed her up with a quick spring.

"You must not quit the city," he said. "I will help you find your husband if you really want to see him, but you must keep with me the secret that is ours alone."

"The secret of the face at the window?"

"Yes, yes."

She recoiled and gave him a look which seemed to tell the story of a startling revelation.

"I know you now. You are one of those man-

hunters. You are trying to solve the mystery of Madeline Meggs."

"I will solve it. I have promised the dead that."

"Then the trail is yonder," and the gloved hand of the little woman pointed again at the window where she had seen the startling apparition of a human face.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHADOW ON THE STONES.

We need not say that the adventure of Mrs. Tibbets in the old den occupied by her husband strangely impressed the Gilt-Edge Detective.

It was a new revelation.

It came to him like a story from the musty records of the past, and the surroundings of the narration—the face at the window and the little woman's declaration that Gilbert Haskins had sworn to get even with Madeline Meggs—deepened the mystery and darkened the trail he had been treading.

He drew from Mrs. Tibbets a pledge that she would not quit the city without his knowledge, and having seen her installed in a plain boarding-house where quietude was a leading feature, he went back to the case.

The man on the roof was the puzzle now.

Was it true that Mrs. Tibbets had actually recognized Gilbert Haskins, the convict?

Could the face at the window have been his after all these years of silence and separation?

That night yet Gilt-Edge Dan entered the house of an old member of the detective force, one who no longer hunted men with his old-time avidity or keenness, and asked him if he knew anything about a prisoner named Gilbert Haskins.

This man had served in the South before the war and was among the shrewdest of his class.

"I knew him," was the reply the ferret received. "I accompanied him to prison."

"What became of him?"

The old Vidocq smiled and ran his hand reflectively through his long gray beard.

"I know what the world believes," said he. "It believes that when the prison was partially burned during the famous revolt, Gilbert Haskins perished."

"Do you believe it?"

"No. I've seen him since."

"The same man?"

"Yes; the same Gilbert Haskins who was convicted for attempting to steal his sister-in-law's wedding jewels."

"Then he did not perish in the flames, but served out his time."

"No, ten prisoners escaped that time and he was one of them."

"You have proof of this, have you?"

"All I want to satisfy myself. I have seen Gilbert Haskins within the last three years."

"In New York?"

"Yes, in this city."

"You don't know his haunts now, do you?"

"No. But let me tell you something. If you are looking for him you will look in vain."

"Why so?"

"Because he no longer resembles the Gilbert Haskins who stood before the Southern judge and received a sentence for a crime he never committed. It was a case of hatred."

"The wedding jewels were stolen, weren't they?"

"Yes, but the crime was fastened on the innocent and the threat which the prisoner made against the bride in open court was not altogether undeserved."

"But she swore she saw him that night."

"She swore to just what her husband put into her mouth."

"That's a bold charge, for the husband is still living."

"I know that and I have wondered a thousand times whether he ever feels the stings of remorse. I would not proclaim it from the house-tops, but I am prepared to say that Lot Haskins forced his bride to swear to what she said that day. It was her testimony that convicted Gilbert Haskins; she sent him up for ten years and Lot Haskins thus got him out of his way."

"What about Epsom Tibbets?" asked the detective.

"They tried to make out that he wanted to steal the jewels. I recollect that distinctly; but I don't think the fellow had a hand in it at all. Neither had Gilbert Haskins."

A moment's silence passed between the two ferrets.

"You know that Madeline Meggs was killed in Tibbets's office?" said Gilt-Edge Dan at length.

"Yes. I know, too, that she was the bride who swore away the life and happiness of Gilbert Haskins."

"You have watched this dark case though you no longer take the trail."

"I have watched it and, what is more, I think I have studied it out, here in this little room."

"Well?"

"Gilbert Haskins kept his threat—that's all."

The old ferret once more stroked his beard and smiled over his dictum.

"What do you say, Captain Damon?" he asked. "What do you say now if you haven't said anything before? Who else would follow Madeline Meggs and give her the death-blow?"

Those diamonds were the same ones that prompted the other crime. She never let them get out of her possession. I don't know how she escaped death the night of the burning of the boat, but that she did is evidenced by the fact that she was in Epsom Tibbets's office."

Gilt-Edge Dan said nothing.

"I haven't given out my belief to any one and I'll tell you why," continued the old detective. "That woman gained my hatred by her testimony. She seemed eager to send Gilbert Haskins up, even though I believe at the time that her husband was at the bottom of the whole accursed scheme."

"Well, they succeeded."

"Only too well and it has cost her her life with the loss of the diamonds."

"But Lot Haskins seems to have no qualms of conscience."

"He never had," laughed the old retired detective. "This man who lives like a lord with no one to share his wealth but the beautiful child who was the offspring of his match with Madeline, probably hasn't heard of the murder."

"Oh, yes he has," cried Gilt-Edge Dan. "He knows that his wife was killed in Tibbets's office."

"But he makes no sign that he knows it."

"No; he made none for Olive's sake."

"I wonder if he thinks that the hand he antagonized did the deed? I would like to know that."

"I don't think he thinks Gilbert Haskins has a hand in the crime."

"But you do, don't you, Captain Dan?"

Again the eyes of the ferret lit up with a light that mystified the old shadow, and leaning toward his friend, he said:

"I will tell you later on. I can't say just what I believe for I have made several discoveries within the last few hours."

"But you will find out that I am right. You will discover, if you keep on the trail, that the hand I manacled in that Southern court struck the blow he said should fall on the head of the woman who swore away his best years."

Gilt-Edge Dan stood at the door of the old man's room and was looking back at him as he sat reflectively in his arm-chair and toyed with his beard.

"You won't keep the trail much longer till you are convinced that I am right, Damon."

"Perhaps not."

"You doubt now?"

"To be honest, I do. I doubt that Gilbert Haskins killed Madeline Meggs."

"Because you have struck another trail. Is that it? You think you see another hand in this mystery?"

"I think I do. Good-night."

The detective of Gotham went down the steps and sought his lodgings.

He found seated at his fire with a glow on her face the little girl, Clova, his friend and oft-times companion.

She greeted him with a smile, and then her face lost color.

"I've been sitting here, half in dread, for nearly an hour," she exclaimed.

"You, Clova? But you could have locked the door."

"Yes, but somehow or other I didn't. I even forgot that," replied the waif of The Rookery. "I fell asleep awhile ago, and when I awoke a man was just quitting the room."

"Quitting this room, child?"

"Yes, going out the door, there," answered the little girl. "I did not get to see much of him, for he was gone in a moment, but it seemed to me that he wore a mask."

Gilt-Edge Dan went to his desk and unlocked it.

"There was some one here," said he, turning to Clova. "You were not dreaming, child."

"Did he rob you, Captain Dan?"

"He didn't take anything very valuable," was the response. "He may have overlooked what he was looking for."

"I hope so, for I wouldn't have him rob you, with me on guard, for the world."

The Gilt-Edge Sharp came back to his little friend, and took a seat beside her.

"It is strange, but I seem to be watched," she said.

"You, Clova?"

"Yes, I caught a handsome woman watching me this evening, and she even asked me where I lived, and if I didn't want to go and live with her. It was queer. I almost ran against her, and it seemed as if what she said was prompted by a desire to say something to please me, or to capture me. She was very fine looking, Captain Dan, and her bracelets, which were gold, and had serpent heads where they clasped, almost dazzled my eyes in the early lamplight."

"Serpent heads, Clova?"

"Oh, yes. I saw them distinctly. They were very beautiful."

Gilt-Edge Dan did not speak, but looked from the child's face into the grate, and felt that she was watching him with wonderment uppermost in her dark eyes.

"What does she want with Clova?" he said to himself. "What does Lura the Leopard Queen want with this child-friend of mine? She failed to entrap me, and now she wants to get the

child a new home. No, it is another setting of the trap. It is another play by the league. It means that the game is going on against Olive Haskins, and her cold-blooded father. It means, too, that the mystery of Madeline Meggs is still unsolved."

All at once the ferret of New York sprung up and crossed the room.

Clova saw him open the door and lean out into the passage.

From where he stood he could see to the foot of the staircase, and there the light of the nearest lamp lay like a shower of gold.

But a shadow blurred this bright spot.

He saw on the stones of the pave the head and shoulders of a man.

They were so well defined that the detective stepped to the top of the flight, and looked at the shadow.

Then he saw more.

The shadow glided off while he looked, but he had seen enough.

He had seen the shadow of Captain Tunis.

CHAPTER XVII.

DETECTIVE AND CONVICT.

The reader will recall the robbery which took place in Captain Tunis's house, while Simon Sulks was sitting in the chair half-choked to death by the stern grip of Boston Bilkus.

It will be remembered that the one-eyed man obtained from the hidden niche in the wall a package of papers which he eagerly appropriated, and that he left the house just in time to avoid the man he had plundered.

It was the night after the theft, and the man who had committed it stood among the shadows of his little room when he was startled to see the figure of Gilt-Edge Dan stand before him.

Boston, the ex-jail-bird, fell back, and for a moment seemed inclined to resent the sudden intrusion, but breaking into a laugh he welcomed the ferret, and the two soon fell to talking.

Every now and then the single eye roved to a plain little table near one of the walls, and the look told that something of importance was there.

Yet not a word about the robbery said the man who had committed it.

All at once the detective changed the subject, and the first word that left his lips seemed to drive the listener within himself.

"You've been behind the bars, Boston, but I don't say this to recall an unpleasant past," said Gilt-Edge Dan. "Did you ever hear of a man named Gilbert Haskins?"

The face of the convict seemed to lose every shade of color and for a moment he sat spell-bound as it were and stared at the human ferret.

"You may have heard of him and his act," continued Damon. "If my query has called up the past you need not answer it."

"I have heard of the man," said the convict with an effort. "Yes, I have heard of Gilbert Haskins. He came from the South, eh?"

"From Louisiana."

"Sent up for—for theft?"

"Yes, for stealing his sister-in-law's diamonds."

Boston looked at the detective and seemed to swallow hard.

"I recollect the story. But he didn't do it! He never touched those jewels."

"But he never tried to prove that he didn't. He sat, I am told, dumb before the jury that tried him and never opened his mouth till he was sentenced, when he arose and promised to remember the woman who had sworn him to prison."

"Yes, he did that, Gilbert Haskins did," said Boston, reflectively. "I can't say that I blame him and there were many who heard him did not fault him for that curse."

"So I have been told. Did you ever meet this man?"

"I have met him."

"When did you see him last?"

The jail-bird bent toward the detective and for a moment said nothing.

"Don't you know that the convicts in the prison to which he was sent revolted and set the old trap on fire?—that seven were burned to death and that a few got out, most of whom were afterward recaptured?"

"That is a matter of record," said Gilt-Edge Dan. "They rendered the name of that Penitentiary historical; but that is not what I am after. When did you see Gilbert Haskins last?"

"Why, man, he was among the unlucky, or lucky seven."

The detective was looking Boston squarely in the face and the convict was returning the look with the same curiosity.

"What makes you so anxious to hear of this man Gilbert Haskins?" asked the jail-bird at last.

"It may be a part of the trail to the mystery of Madeline Meggs."

"What, the history of that man who went to prison for the crime some one else committed?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who he was?"

"I think I do. Boston, old boy, I haven't been idle since taking the track of this dark mystery. I have made a few discoveries. I have picked

up several links in the chain of guilt. Gilbert Haskins was Lot Haskins's brother."

Boston Bilkus did not speak for a moment. He looked across the room toward the stand and it seemed as if he were about to rise and go to it.

"Lot's brother. Yes, that is right. He was the brother of the husband of Madeline Meggs. It is queer that, despite her married life, she never lost her maiden name. Madeline Meggs she was when she married him and Madeline Meggs when she died. I don't think I ever heard of a case exactly like it."

"It is singular, that's a fact. But let us go back to Gilbert Haskins, but for a minute only. Do you believe he perished in the flames started by the rebellious convicts?"

"Why not? They found his trunk and buried it. Burned to a crisp! That's what they said, and Gilbert Haskins was so marked that the fire could not destroy his identity."

Gilt-Edge Dan arose and picked up his hat.

While he stood erect in the lamplight that flooded the convict's hiding-place, he looked down into the almost white face upturned to him, and tried to read there the secret warfare going on in the jail-bird's heart.

For the third time Bilkus glanced toward the table, and at one time he made a sudden motion as if he intended to spring across the room and open its one drawer.

"Do you know that old Tibbets has run off?" the ferret asked.

A smile illumined the sad face of the man from prison.

"I know that. He fled in the night with the shadow of Captain Tunis at his heels."

"Watched by the captain, eh?"

"Tracked across the river and watched to the door of the car."

"And you were watching the captain, Boston?"

"I was playing a little game of my own," grinned the convict. "Old Tibbets ran off from a shadow, but never thought he had the keen-sighted Captain Tunis after him."

It seemed to give Boston pleasure to describe the flight of the money shark.

"He should have stayed," said the detective. "He might have had the pleasure of meeting a long-neglected member of his family."

The convict started.

"Well, he didn't stay. I guess he wanted to get out of the city, for the reporters did pester him, and perhaps he thought he would be dragged into court some day and made to retell the story of the night of the 27th."

As he finished, Boston crossed the room and sat down at the table which he had watched like a hawk.

Gilt-Edge Dan saw him take a key from his pocket and open the drawer.

"This is my safe," said he, looking up to see the eyes of the detective watching him. "I don't have hiding-places in the wall, ha, ha! I never had such places about me. But here's where I keep my treasures, and here is the last one I have discovered."

He removed from the drawer a packet tied with a broad red string, at one end of which was a broken waxen seal.

Gilt-Edge Dan had already gone forward and was bending over the table while the ex-convict opened the papers showing him a lot of closely-written sheets of white paper.

"I stole this, actually stole it!" he went on. "You didn't know that I had gone back to my own calling, but once a thief always a thief, you know."

By this time the document lay on the table and Captain Dan was looking at the pages which seemed from the first to have a strange attraction for him, for Boston Bilkus saw that he appeared to be devouring every word in view.

"I had to choke a man to get it, but never mind—I brought it away with me," the one-eyed went on again. "I would have taken life to have secured what you are reading. You see what it is?"

"I do. It is the statement that Lot Haskins and his wife Madeline deliberately swore Gilbert Haskins into prison."

"That's just what it is!" cried Boston. "It is nothing else, but, as you see, that is a true copy of the original. It isn't the real stuff; but it's just as good."

The detective's eyes fell again to the document and for some time he read while the one eye at the edge of the table regarded him with the intensity of a living coal.

"Where did you find this, Boston?" he asked at length.

"I robbed Captain Tunis."

"You found this paper in his house, did you?"

"I choked Simon Sulks and made him point out its hiding-place."

"Then you are interested in establishing the innocence of Gilbert Haskins?"

"I am. I knew the man and I don't intend that his memory shall be smirched for all time."

There was a depth to the man's voice which Gilt-Edge Dan had never noticed in it before. He saw the single eye gleaming at the edge of the table and the long fingers of Boston Bilkus came up over it like a lot of serpents and rested

on the board ready at the slightest alarm to clutch the paper and hold it fast.

"Well, what are you going to do?" said the ferret. "You have but the copy of the statement. The original is better."

"I will have that in time. Don't you see what is taking place? Captain Tunis knows the truth. Captain Tunis is the shadow that has fallen across Lot Haskins's life. Captain Tunis is the man in the heart of the game. He is the spider that is after human blood. This man from—God knows where—man does not—forced that confession from Lot Haskins and it is the club he and his companion, the woman with the leopard, holds over the millionaire's head."

"It doesn't take one long to see that, with this document before one," smiled the ferret.

"I should think not," said Boston, raking in the paper. "I thought he had some written secret hidden somewhere in that house and I raided it to be discovered by Simon Sulks the man whom I choked before and whose coming home at that moment was very opportune for me, for without him I would not have found the paper in the hidden niche."

"You're a genius, Boston," said Gilt-Edge Dan. "Having found the statement, what are you going to do?"

"Help you find the person who killed Madeline Meggs."

The detective seemed to take a long breath.

"Do you believe that the secret you robbed Captain Tunis of is the only one he is keeping?"

"I do not," cried the convict. "I don't think or believe anything of the kind. That man knows more than I have discovered. The two are playing a deep and dastardly game against Lot Haskins and his daughter. It is more than a game for gold."

"You know what Olive said?"

"That Lot Haskins is to marry Lura?"

"Yes."

"And I said that she never shall," and the clinched hand of Boston came down upon the table with ringing emphasis. "I have sworn that over in secret time and again. But that isn't all. Olive did not tell all she knows."

"What did she keep back?"

"The fact that she had been included in the bargain—that she is to be given to Captain Tunis."

"She told me that after you went away."

"Ah, did she? I suspected it before I was a square from the house. I knew that they wouldn't stop with roping Lot Haskins, the nabob, into the net, but that Captain Tunis would complete the game by capturing the girl."

Gilt-Edge Dan watched Boston hide the document in the table and carefully lock the drawer.

"You have picked up several clews, have you?" he said, looking once more up into the ferret's face. "You are still on the trail, but the mystery of Madeline Meggs remains unsolved."

"It is still unsolved."

"One-half of those who think believe that old Tibbets killed her and took the jewels."

"I know that."

"But he didn't. No, the old shark tells the truth. She was killed during his absence. There are those who wanted that woman—the wife of Lot Haskins—out of the way."

"Who are they, Boston?"

"Captain Tunis and Lura, the Leopard Queen."

"And Gilbert Haskins, eh?"

"Great God, man! Gilbert Haskins is dead!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

LURA HEARS A BIT OF NEWS.

"GILBERT HASKINS is dead."

Gilt-Edge Dan heard these words when he was three squares from the jail-bird's nest.

They combated the statement he had heard from the old retired ferret and the scene in old Tibbets's deserted slice when Mrs. Tibbets, the returned wife, declared that she saw at the back window the face of the millionaire's convict brother.

"That convict takes a great interest in the history of the man who went up for the robbery of the bride's jewels," said he to himself. "Boston Bilkus has come into the game in a singular manner. He maintains that Gilbert Haskins died the night of the revolt, yet old Captain Dunn is as positive that he has seen him since. Then, there is pretty Mrs. Tibbets who was a little excited, but who declares that she saw Gilbert at the window. This is getting darker so far as the convict brother is concerned, but not quite so dark as regards the mystery of Madeline Meggs. Yet, what have I discovered?"

Almost nothing—nothing beyond the fact that Gilbert Haskins swore in open court that he would "get even" with Madeline, and that if she lived she would have interfered in the game Captain Tunis and Lura are playing.

"That is the whole thing in a nut-shell," and the detective walking from the convict's nest smile to himself.

The city clocks were proclaiming the hour before midnight when a man appeared in the vicinity of the house occupied by Lura of the Leopards.

It looked dark and silent but a light was seen beyond the shutters and this man, after watch-

ing the windows a few moments, mounted the steps and entered.

A minute later he crossed the threshold of the right hand parlor and appeared rather suddenly to the beautiful woman there.

Captain Tunis stood face to face with the queen of the plot.

"I have been waiting," said Lura, looking up. "I thought you were never coming. You must have had something to keep you."

"And you might have known that something kept me if I was late. I have been kept back by business."

A smile revealed two rows of pearly teeth.

"Well, madame, I have been robbed," continued Captain Tunis.

Lura started.

"You robbed?" she cried.

"Yes, madame, robbed!"

He went to the mantel, found there a cigar wrapped in delicate tin-foil, and lighting it, leaned on the marble and watched her.

"Why don't you tell me? Who robbed you and what was taken?" she exclaimed.

"The same man who played Simon such a scurvy trick tricked him again."

"Not the man with the one eye?"

"Yes, madame."

"Why do you permit this? Why don't you dismiss this man who allows people to plunder him with impunity?"

"It wasn't Simon's fault this time," smiled Captain Tunis. "He was suddenly overpowered and by this one-eyed rascal who has the spring of a lion and the grip of a giant."

"He must be half lion from what I hear of him."

"I think he is."

"But what was taken?"

"He found the document in the wall."

"The statement?"

"The true copy of it."

Lura seemed relieved.

"He didn't get the original, then?"

"No, but what he got is likely to serve his purpose just as well if he knows how to use it."

Captain Tunis puffed away, looking through the smoke-clouds at the beautiful occupant of the chair.

"This is provoking," said Lura. "We must look after this man."

"Just so, madame. He seems to have a purpose."

"And he seems to be an adroit thief and burglar."

"Yes."

"You don't intend that he shall carry on this way?" she continued.

"Not if I can help it, of course."

"You told me when you brought the news of Simon's first loss that you thought you knew this fellow."

"I think I do. He is a jail-bird."

"Oh, a man of experience," exclaimed Lura.

"He hangs about Gilt-Edge Damon."

"What, about the detective?"

"Yes. What is more, he seems to be helping that man."

"How can he help him?"

"Well, for one thing, he has plundered Simon Sulks, my secretary, and now he robs me."

Lura was silent for a moment.

"But, that would seem to be in favor of Gilbert Haskins, the man who went up for taking the Franco jewels."

A smile crossed Captain Tunis's face, and he stopped smoking for a moment.

"I can't help this, but if he hadn't surprised Simon he might not have fared so well at my house."

Lura said nothing. Perhaps Captain Tunis saw the dark eyes that seemed to be watching the fire in the grate; perhaps he saw the serpent-headed bracelets that caught new luster from the glow of that fire. At any rate, he seemed content to wait for the beauty to speak.

"After to-morrow we will be fixed to fight them all," she said at last. "Day after to-morrow I will be intrenched in the house of the nabob. How are you getting along?"

"With my suit?"

"Yes. What does the beautiful Olive say?"

"Oh, she shows her mother's mettle," said he. "She has revolted. She repudiates the bargain."

"She knows it, then?"

"Yes. Her ears gave her the first inkling of it, and then her father confessed when pressed."

"But you won't lose the prize on this account?"

"Lose it? Lose the wife I am after?" and Captain Tunis's eyes seemed to flash as he turned them on Lura. "I have never lost a game in all my life."

He said these words so coolly that the woman in the chair looked up and gave him a smile of approval and confirmation.

"I know that, captain," she said. "You never lost a game. That is right. But we never played one of this kind."

"True, madame. The stakes were never so large or so valuable. I am going to win and so are you."

"But something must be done. This common thief who holds people up, and robs others of

precious papers, and this detective who is on the trail—both are dangerous."

"Yes."

"What are you going to do? We failed to trap the leopard-seller. He was shrewd enough to keep out of the trap we set for him. You said he would."

"I know the man. Gilt-Edge Damon is no ordinary person."

"The very reason we should have him off the scent. He is interested in the welfare of Lot Haskins's child. He has seen Jack Parsons, you say."

"They have met."

The next instant the queenly figure of Lura stood before the man of plots and looked him in the eye.

"Captain Tunis, both these men must be caged," she said.

"Gilt-Edge Damon and the common thief?"

"Yes."

"Both shall be caged!"

"That's good."

"What about old Tibbets?"

"Let him go. He is in no one's road. The papers have been hinting of late that he didn't tell all he knew and you know what might be made out of that?"

"Yes. The old man is liable to arrest. Some over-zealous detective may take him for the crime."

"But let him go. We don't want these two men, the detective and the jail-bird, to interfere. To-morrow I am to become the wife of Lot Haskins; to-morrow I quit this house for another. I must not be molested here. You know that we must not be watched or shadowed in the new home."

Captain Tunis cleverly knocked the ashes from his cigar and laid it on the mantel.

It had gone out.

"Just as you say, madame," he said.

"Am I not right?"

"I guess you are."

"Well, then, see that the road is clear."

"It shall be done, but you don't mind to help me, eh?"

"I will do anything. I am ready for any sort of work," cried Lura.

"That's what I thought. Then you will help spring the trap."

"On which one?"

"The convict first."

"Go on. You have a plan perfected. You never come to me with one but half-thought out."

Captain Tunis bowed.

"But first, I have a bit of news for you, he said. "I have made a queer discovery. You recollect little Maggie Naggs?"

"What, the woman who married Tibbets?"

"Yes, the same person."

"I remember her."

"Well, she is in the city."

"When did she come?"

"I don't know. I know that she is occupying quiet lodgings in a quiet street, and that Captain Dan, the Gilt-Edge Sharp, got them for her."

Lura seemed to start at this.

"Are they all gathering in New York?" she suddenly cried, with a strange smile at her lips.

"So the detective has discovered Mrs. Tibbets, and secured lodgings for her? Did he know she was coming?"

"I can't say."

Lura went to the red curtains, and parting them, vanished for a moment.

Captain Tunis watched the arras till she came back. She had donned a close-fitting street sacque, and wore gloves.

"Where is this woman?" she said, with fire in the depths of her eyes.

"What, you don't intend to visit her?" he exclaimed.

"I want to see her! She is dangerous—this little heap of excitement and passion is. I haven't seen her for years. Tell me where the ferret has hid her."

Captain Tunis told her, and falling back, Lura held out one of her hands, saying in eager tones, as she glanced at it:

"It doesn't look very dangerous, eh, Captain Tunis? But that hand is a match for them all!"

He regarded her with a look that seemed to read her very thoughts, then with a sudden start toward the door, he said:

"You need not see Mrs. Tibbets to-night. The trap I am going to set will render that unnecessary."

"Then, you are going to set it?"

"I am."

"Remember to-morrow. It is my wedding-day."

"I won't forget that, madame," and with a laugh Captain Tunis opened the door and left Lura alone.

He looked up at the house as he passed down the steps, and a smile seemed to play with his lips.

"To-morrow! Yes, I will remember that. Your wedding-day, eh? You are to enter Lot Haskins's house, but if the hand of Gilt-Edge Damon comes between, there will be a postponement of the ceremony. You are all blood and coolness, Lura, my beautiful tigress; but this man is really dangerous. But he has sealed his

own doom. He has taken into his confidence a man who is as dangerous as himself, and who has stolen from me enough to enrich him for life, if he only knew how to use it."

Captain Tunis walked away.

Half an hour later he turned up in another part of the city, and unlocking a certain house, he went in and threw himself into a chair, in a luxuriously-furnished room.

He was at home again.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOX IS CAGED.

GILT-EDGE DAN, the ferret, was not surprised when he returned to his lodgings, an hour after his last interview with Boston Bilkins, to find little Clova, the child of The Rookery, an occupant of the place.

Of late the little one had been paying him frequent visits, and glad to shelter her when he knew that the wind blew through the bedrooms of the old house with a shrill whistle that seemed to chill every one who heard, he had given her a key, and told her that his fire was ever ready to warm her cheeks and give her new life.

She started up at sight of him, and holding in her hand a folded note, said that a boy had brought it, a boy who said that a woman had given it to him on the street.

The Gilt-Edge Sharp opened it and read for a moment.

"When did it come, Clova?" he asked.

"Just ten minutes ago. You might have met the boy."

"But I did not," said the detective. "I saw no one who might be the bearer of this letter."

"It is important, then?"

The ferret's face showed that it was.

He looked again at the note and read it half aloud.

"I told her to communicate with me if anything turned up," he muttered. "Yes, I remember telling Mrs. Tibbets that if she had anything for me to send me word."

He folded the letter and went out.

"The queerest part of it is that she should change her lodgings," he said. "I thought she had a nice place where she was, but these women are queer creatures and she is one of them."

Gilt-Edge Dan had read a note from Mrs. Tibbets saying that for cause she had changed her hiding-place, and that she wanted to see him at once.

No matter at what hour he received the note, he should come.

When he struck the street in which the note said its writer had located, the man of trails stopped and looked down under the trees that stood near the gutter, throwing the shade of the branches over it and half-way to the middle of the narrow street.

What had caused Mrs. Tibbets to seek that street? Perhaps she thought she would be safer there than on the other one. Safer from whom?

Watching the houses as he passed along, he stopped at the door of the number designated and rung.

It was a quiet-looking, two-story place with no extras, and just such a house as a woman like Maggie Tibbets would seek.

In a little while he heard steps in the hallway, and the door opened.

"Come in."

The portal closed the moment the detective crossed the threshold, then, as he recoiled toward the wall, he caught sight of a figure that came toward him, and the next moment something came down upon his head and the floor seemed to slide from beneath his feet.

Some time after these last recollections the detective came back to life.

It seemed a dream, but it was not.

No, he felt the note in his pocket, but he could not read it for his surroundings were darkness itself and the air of the chamber which seemed an underground one was fetid and stifling.

Entrapped!

This word rose to the detective's lips and the wall which he touched confirmed his predicament.

He had fallen into the power of the enemy.

For some time he stood leaning against the wall and his thoughts were curses for his folly and absentmindedness.

He could not believe that Mrs. Tibbets was a party to the deception. No, she had not played into the hands of the foe, but her name had been used 'to trap him—the only name by which the enemy could successfully conjure.'

Gilt-Edge Dan went the rounds of

itself and for some time he stood there and tried to catch noises from the outside as they seemed to come in through the door; but he could not fix the location of his prison by any such means.

Captain Dan discovered that he had been disarmed during the unconsciousness that followed the blow in the hallway.

The enemy had left him nothing but the decoy letter, as if to tell him that, having accomplished their purpose, they did not care for that.

The touch of the note maddened the Gilt-Edge Sharp and jerking it from his pocket he was about to tear it to pieces when sober second judgment suggested another course.

He kept the note, replacing it in his pocket, and again gave himself up to thought.

"I am in the snare at last!" he said. "This would make Boston smile for he has advised me to trust no one while on the trail of this hidden mystery! This would amuse the jail-bird and no wonder. I'll bet my head that the note wouldn't have caged him. But it seemed so clear that it came from Mrs. Tibbets that I did not stop to think, but fell into the net and was caught."

Gilt-Edge Dan could do nothing but think in that dark and noisome place.

He paced it back and forth till he seemed to have worn a path in the stones at his feet. He felt the wall time and again until he at last fell back and vowed that if he ever got out, no more letters would decoy him into the trap.

If he ever got out. Ab, that was it!

At the same time a man was going back to a house which he had left but a few hours before.

Every now and then one of his gloved hands twisted a silken mustache, the ends of which were carefully waxed and while he walked along a gleam of triumph seemed to light up his dark, deep eyes.

"You catch foxes sometimes," he said with a chuckle. "You sometimes trap the trapper and that when you play a risky game. I thought it was worth trying and by Jove! it succeeded."

He laughed again. He turned into a street and entered a house the key to which he furnished from his own spacious pocket.

"Still on deck, Simon?" he asked as he entered a room where a young man seated at a desk in one corner, appeared anxious to see him.

"I'm still at it. No chokers this time, captain."

"No single eyes in the room, eh?" smiled Captain Tunis.

Simon Sulks winced and returned to his work.

"I forgot to ask you, Simon. Did he seem glad when he got hold of the papers in the niche?"

"Yes, sir. They seemed to be just what he was looking for."

Captain Tunis turned to his own desk and sat down.

Ever and anon Simon would look across the room at him seeing nothing but his broad back and shoulders.

What the secretary's thoughts were no one knew and Captain Tunis did not seem to care.

Presently a knock sounded on the door and Captain Tunis, with a basty look at Simon, crossed the room.

"You?" he cried, looking at the person who stood there. "You here, in this house?"

"Why not? You didn't come and I had to see you."

Lot Haskins crossed Captain Tunis's threshold for the first time in his life.

Indeed, the man with the black eyes was not aware that the millionaire knew where he lived, and that is why he started so when he found him in his house.

"You can go out, Simon," said Captain Tunis glancing at the young secretary, who shut the desk and took the unexpected vacation.

"Now, what is it?"

Captain Tunis turned to the nabob who stood in the middle of the room waiting until the door had closed on the gliding figure of Simon Sulks.

"I can't keep my promise to-morrow."

There was no reply for a moment. The man known as Captain Tunis seemed to flash a dark look from the eyes that looked into Haskins's face, but for a moment he said nothing.

"I must ask you to let me have time," he went on. "I am in a strait. I have lost my child."

"What, you have lost Olive?" exclaimed Captain Tunis.

"Yes. Olive has left my roof. We had a scene, and she said good-by."

"But this thing can't be postponed. It must go on. I am not the person to see, but it will do you no good to see her; still, if you desire it—if you will cross her at this stage of the game—"

The nabob of Gotham put out his hand and cried:

"I won't see her, but you must. There is no telling just what my daughter's disappearance means. She seems to know everything. She knows the compact that exists between us. She has overheard nearly everything, and with the going away of Parsons—but I don't regret that—I am, as you see, in a strait."

Captain Tunis watched Haskins narrowly.

He seemed to see what all his words meant; but his sternness did not relax.

"We can find her. We can find Olive, I say; but to-morrow is the time set for the ceremony, and speaking for Lura, whose sentiments I know, it must go on."

Lot Haskins seemed to stagger to a chair, and Captain Tunis saw him drop into it unnerved.

"Won't she consent to putting it off for a day?" he asked.

"She will not."

"Then, tell her that I will keep my part of the compact. Tell her that at the appointed hour I will make her my wife."

Under the black mustache lurked a smile. In the eyes above it shone the triumph of a demon.

"Haven't you tried to track Olive down?" asked Captain Tunis. "What have you been doing since she went off?"

"She did not go till about an hour ago. I waited for you, but you came not."

"Who told you where to find me?"

"Never mind that. I found you," smiled the millionaire. "I will go home and prepare for to-morrow."

Captain Tunis took Haskins's arm as he crossed the room, and said in a whisper at his ear:

"All is well now. The fox is caged and will not show even his teeth any more."

Lot Haskins looked at the speaker, but said nothing. Their eyes met, and those of Captain Tunis seemed to speak volumes.

The nabob knew that "the fox" meant Gilt-Edge Dan, the fer et.

CHAPTER XX. A TERRIBLE DOCUMENT.

LOT HASKINS went home.

Once in the hallway of the sumptuous house, he stopped and seemed to reel toward the door that opened into the library which he habitually occupied when in the house.

Going to the table that stood in the center of the room, he stopped short and then clutched at a piece of paper covered with writing that seemed to have been placed there for him.

"Merciful heavens!" he cried, sinking into the chair and gazing at the writing.

A moment later he was reading one of the most startling documents he had seen in many years.

Every word seemed to stand out like words of a sentence of death and the cold drops of sweat that stood on his forehead and glittered icily there told under what a terrible strain the millionaire was.

The sheet was as large as a sheet of foolscap, but there was more than one. There were several, but the writing was rather large and took up a good deal of room.

The clock ticked away on the marble mantel behind the nabob; the rumble of an occasional carriage fell upon his ears; but neither diverted his thoughts from the document that trembled in his hands.

He read like one fascinated by every word and charmed in a terrible manner by the narrative.

This is the document in full:

"To Lot Haskins:—

"You will read this with breathless interest when I tell you at the start that it comes from the dead—that the hand which pens it here at your own desk really owes you a vengeance of the most terrible description. I will make no more preface. I know you don't want to read one. I know, too, that you are making preparations for your marriage and that on this, your wedding eve, you will not want to be bothered by long sentences.

"You are rich, Lot Haskins. You have all the money one needs or craves at your command. You are counted among the nabobs of this city; but you were not always so. Let me ask what became of the famous diamonds. Let me ask what became of Gilbert Haskins, the man—the brother—whose life you and your bride swore away in the Southern court. Who is that brother who never touched those accursed diamonds and whose liberty went out from him like the last song a bird sings before it is cage? You don't have remorse I suppose, Lot Haskins. You sleep well and make your bargain with Captain Tunis and the tress he has in training. You have a fine home here, but what would it be if the police knew that you came down the steps leading to old Tibbets's office the night of the 27th?

"Yes, Lot Haskins, what would the detectives say if they knew this as I know it? What would Captain Damon do if he knew that, while Tibbets was at the letter box on the sidewalk and Madeline Meggs, your wife sat in his office, you were on those steps? When he came back, you recollect, she was lying on the floor dead and the diamonds gone. This is true. You were there that night. You crept up those steps and back again. But you have kept your visit from the bloodhounds of the city. You haven't ventured this bit of information to the serpents of New York. Why haven't you?"

"What ever became of Gilbert Haskins, the jail-bird? What ever became of the man who stood up in the court and saw you two swear his liberty away without a blush? You say he died in prison. You say that he perished when the convicts revolted, as they had a right to do, according to the code of human justice. He is dead, is he? Gilbert Haskins was one of the burned seven, was he? That is what the world believes. You have dreamed a thousand times that he was among the dead when the fire was subdued. That is well. It gave you good nights and needed sleep, no doubt. But what if the man still lives? Did you ever think of this, Lot Haskins? Did you ever stop to consider what the consequences might be if Gilbert Haskins still inhabited this earth in the flesh, and did not lie beneath it a lot of rotting bones?"

Lot Haskins stopped and breathed hard.

What he read was telling on him in a terrible manner. He seemed to be piling up months of agony instead of moments of horror.

"I say, did you ever think of these things?" he read on. "No, of course you did not. You have let passion and money run riot in your affections. You have played a double game with mankind. You have been a whitened sepulcher to your child, and but lately she learned the terrible truth, but not entirely from your lips. Now, what are you about to do? You are to marry a woman who is simply playing a game—a tigress from the jungles of death, and, with her mate—her deadly mate, Captain Tunis—she will end the play by the death of their dupe."

"But wouldn't such an end be eternal justice? Wouldn't it be in keeping with the laws of God? 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. 'I will repay.' I ought to stop here, but I cannot. I will go the end of this thing, for I know that you are drinking in every word, and that I should go to the end of it."

"You may wed Lura to-morrow. You may bring to this house this woman who has won you by what she knows. You are in the toils of fate, and they hold you fast. Gilbert Haskins will yet come between you and your ambition. The brother, dead you may think him, will yet stand on the serpent who was really at the bottom of his blighted life. You may marry her to-morrow, but if you do, the secret that you went up and down Epsom Tibbets's stairs that night may come out. Think of it. Look this thing squarely in the face. Be a man, Lot Haskins. Don't shrink, coward-like, from what is before you. You are to choose. If you become the husband of Lura, the tigress, you may have to explain this secret visit to the police, and you know that they want a victim, for this Meggs mystery, with its clewless aspect, has made them the butt of the newspapers."

"You haven't had the courage to right the wrong you did years ago. You never tried to clear the stained escutcheon your brother wore. You forced your wife, Madeline, to swear for you, and though she regretted it a thousand times in secret, she died by the hand of the assassin. And who killed her? Who went up and down Tibbets's stairs that one terrible night? Let the world know that she was your wife; let it know that you went to that building while she was there; let it discover that at the time you were the promised husband of another, and then let it put this and that together. This will show you where you are; this will tell you that you are in toils of which you have never dreamed—in toils from which there is no escape if the courts take the evidence of those who know."

"I leave it all with you, Lot Haskins. I came hither to see you face to face, but you are not here. I leave this on your table, for you will see it when you return, and you will not be her husband when you read it. There is time enough yet. The ceremony will not take place until to-morrow. You have time to escape the closing jaws of fate. You have but to step back. Then the mystery of Madeline Meggs will be solved by the ferrets, and you may not suffer beyond a little unpleasant notoriety for a time. You can stand that. Think of the child to whom you are about to give a new mother with the nature of the tigress and the deadly sting of a serpent. If you will not, Lot Haskins—if you will not, I say, take what comes!"

As the reader may suppose, not a word of this terrible document escaped the man who read it.

Each sentence seemed to burn a line across his brain; each word appeared to be traced in letters of fire.

Lot Haskins sat some time in troubled silence after reaching the end of the document.

He looked round the room as if he expected to see the writer step into the light and confront him. He could not breathe for choking; he heard with awful distinctness the beating of his own heart.

"Who wrote it?" he gasped at last. "He dipped his pen into the lake of fire, and traced his words across the sheets with the coolness of the arch-fiend himself. If I marry to-morrow all will come out. If I keep my pledged word with Captain Tunis and Lura, he will tell where I was that night. He says he will see that it gets to the police. Who is this person? And he hints that Gilbert Haskins still lives! He as good as tells me that he did not perish in the fire when the prison burned. Gods! I wish I could have seen him. I wish I could have stolen upon him while he wrote. Why didn't I return an hour sooner? It must have taken him an hour to write that terrible arraignment and threat."

He looked at the paper again and then caught it up madly.

"Into the fire it goes!" he cried, rising and crossing the room. "I won't keep it about."

But some invisible power seemed to hold him back. A hand over which he had no control appeared to restrain him, for he went back to the table and threw the sheets upon it.

"Shall I listen to him?" he said in a husky voice. "Shall I take him at his word and defy him? Captain Tunis should be here; but, no, I wouldn't show it to him."

He stood by the table some time in silence and looked down upon the document, which had come from the very heart of the unknown, as it seemed.

"There is a way out of this," he suddenly cried. "I have been deserted by my child, and no wonder. I have lived a double life to her. I have bartered her to Captain Tunis for the keeping of a certain secret. I have blighted her life, and that when she was looking forward to a cycle of sunshine. I can break the spell. I can banish them all. I ought to do it after reading that letter."

Lot Haskins went to one corner of the library, where he unlocked a little case set in the wall.

A moment later he came back with something clutched in his hand.

"I'll burn this first. They shall not find it here to tell why I committed this act."

He caught up the document again, and carried it to the fire smoldering in the grate.

He stood there and watched the flames eat up the letter, every word of which he believed he could have repeated from memory, and when all was over he went back to the table.

Then his hand opened and a long vial was revealed.

This he placed on the colored cloth and eyed it as its contents of greenish liquid danced with sparkles of light in the glare of the jet.

"It will be giving up the most beautiful woman ever created. It will be losing Lura, but it will bring oblivion," he went on. "It will be baffling this unknown enemy who knows so much. It will beat him out of the revenge he is gloating over. He may have a spite at Lura, not at me. He may be playing a game against her more than against me. Ah! that may be it."

Lot Haskins caught up the vial and carried it back to the shelf in the wall-case. He shut the little door and locked it.

"I defy you. I don't believe you know what you have written. I am going on with my part of the compact. I will make Lura my wife when the chosen hour comes."

He spoke these resolutions aloud.

They would have reached the ears of Olive if she had been listening at the head of the stairs, but Olive was no longer there.

Lot Haskins laughed as if he had broken the force of the words that had held him in thrall for a time.

Sitting down he took up a pen and drew it across a sheet of paper, but the line was jagged and the writing wholly unlike his old hand.

"Has that document made a fool of me?" he cried. "Am I to be shaken from my promise by a bit of writing—a threat—the work of some enemy?"

He threw the pen at the inkstand and crossed the room again.

This time he found a goblet into which he poured a copious draught of wine which he downed to feel it circulating through his veins like new blood.

"That does the work. I am ready now—ready for anything—ready for the altar or the man who penned that threatening document!"

He turned toward the door as it opened.

There had been no sounds in the hall, but a man was there.

And such a man! Lot Haskins thought of the revolver in the desk as the individual came forward with a tread as noiseless as a tiger's and with but one eye to look him through.

"Who are you?" cried the millionaire. "You come in like a thief. I demand your name and errand!"

The person thus addressed came on until he reached the table.

There he stopped and looked into the white face of the nabob.

"I thought I would come back and see you. You've destroyed it, have you?"

Lot Haskins started.

"Are you the man that wrote that infamous document?" he cried.

The one eye seemed to laugh.

"I am the man!" its owner said.

CHAPTER XXI. THE INTERVIEW.

"I AM the man!"

The millionaire might have heard these words under other circumstances and not been affected by them, but now they seemed to pierce him like daggers and he stared at the man who had uttered them.

The owner of the one eye stood at his table and looked into the cold, pale face of the city nabob.

"So you have come back, you say?" said Haskins. "If you had waited a while you need not have gone away. I came in a few moments since and found your document on the table, but, as you see, it is not there now."

"No, it is in the fire," and the speaker glanced toward the grate where some of the ashes of the terrible paper littered the hearth.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the millionaire.

"Want?" echoed the stranger who, as the reader has doubtless suspected ere this, was our old acquaintance Boston Bilkins, the jail-bird. "Want?" he repeated. "What do you think I want after reading that document?"

Lot Haskins said nothing for a moment but looked deeper into the gleaming, watchful eye before him and suddenly fell back with a startling cry.

"You believe it now, don't you?" smiled the convict.

There was no reply. The figure of the man of money slid into the arm-chair and he for a moment turned his face away and appeared to be fighting a mental battle within himself.

All this time Boston Bilkins watched him and

did not move. He seemed to respect the terror and fear that ruled the breast of the millionaire.

"I did not look for you in the flesh," Haskins went on at last. "I have believed that the fire killed you."

"I thought so. But that's neither here nor there. You have read what I left on your table. You haven't forgotten a line of it."

That was true. Not a line, not a word of that terrible document but what still remained in his excited memory.

"Come, it is time for work," said Boston, moving a step nearer the nabob and touching him softly on the shoulder. "The time has come for your decision. What are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"That's a pretty question. You know what is to take place to-morrow unless you deliberately cut the cords of villainy."

"But I can't. My word—my oath, even—is out and—"

"There was a time when you hadn't a great regard for your oath," interrupted the convict.

"There was a time when you stood up in open court and swore away the liberties of your own brother and here in my presence you talk about the sacredness of your word. It's enough to make angels smile, don't you think, Lot Haskins?"

"But, man, you don't know the situation I am in," persisted the nabob.

"I think I am pretty thoroughly acquainted with the situation. I know that you are in the grip of two merciless plotters—that you have been fascinated by the eyes of one, and bound by the power of the other. Yes, I know. I know that you are under the hand of this 'Captain Tunis,' as he calls himself, and that you have promised to become the husband of Lura at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"I have promised."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

Lot Haskins reached up and touched the arm of the man standing at his chair with the drooping shoulder marking him there as it had done in other places.

"You said in the paper that I went up and down Tibbet's stairway that night."

"I said so."

"Who told you this?"

A curious smile passed over the strange-looking face, illumined by the light.

"One eye can see as well as two sometimes," he said.

"You think you saw me, then?"

"I don't think anything about it. I saw you!"

The words were uttered with great deliberation, and their emphasis was such as to attract the man who listened.

"Don't you know that your oath would not go far in the courts of New York?"

"I know a good many things. I know my oath wouldn't be extra good where you say, but there are other eyes."

"You are playing a game now. You are trying to get even for the past. You know what you said that day, and the detectives are liable to put this and that together."

"Just so," and Boston Bilkins broke into a laugh. "You seem to think me mercenary. I am not. I have overlooked the past, or much of it at any rate. I have even forgiven some of it, and that is more than one man in a thousand would do. I can't stay here all night. What are you going to do?"

Lot Haskins continued to eye the man for a moment longer.

"You don't look like him," he finally said. "He had two good eyes, and there was no droop in the shoulder. What proof have I that you are not an impostor?"

"What proof? Is that what you want to see? What proof? This!"

Boston leaned forward till he almost touched the millionaire with his body.

At the same time he tore open his shirt, and holding the front apart, so that Haskins could see the white skin, he bent down, and then transfixed the nabob with the one orb.

"Is this proof enough?" he asked. "What say you now? Memory hasn't deserted you yet, has it?"

Lot Haskins, falling back into the deepest depths of the chair, stared at the scar that looked livid on the convict's breast.

It was a curious scar nearly two inches in length and the years had but brightened it until it had the glow of a living coal.

Nothing was said while the nabob looked.

"What say you now?" said Boston, closing the rent and standing erect again.

"I see. You are he. You did not perish in the fire. But that one eye and the drooped shoulder?"

"Secrets of my own which you will let me keep, I hope?" was the answer.

"Keep them. I don't want them."

Boston Bilkins looked a moment longer in silence and then, dropping his hand upon the millionaire's shoulder, said in low tones:

"It is for you to say."

"What will you do if I persist in carrying out my promise?"

"Try and see."

"Will you go to the police with the story?"

"No, I won't do that. I hate the police. I have cause for hating every wearer of a city uniform. I won't go to them, I say, but I will interfere."

"You will, eh?"

"I will! By the living God! I will come between you and this accursed cabal. I will do it if it costs me the life you and your wife blighted years and years ago."

"Do you want money?"

"Not a dollar! I'm no millionaire and I don't want to be one. You know that Madeline Meggs is dead; you know that she was killed—daggered—in old Tibbets's den and you know, too, that you were in that vicinity that night. You even went up those stairs and came down them again. You, her husband, and that while you had promised to become the husband of another. The years did not divorce you two. Madeline Meggs was spared that night on the river. She did not perish with the odd hundred who died then."

Lot Haskins heard the man through. Then he arose and stood supporting himself by clutching the chair.

If he had been pale before he was white now, but it was a terrible whiteness which seemed to send a tingling thrill through his blood.

"I know she did not die that night, but I have thought the contrary for years."

"I believe that, but you knew she was in the city yet you did not try to bring her home."

"Still, if she had come to me all would have been well."

"With this promise out to Captain Tunis and his tigress? With your word solemnly pledged that you will wed this woman with the leopard?"

"Yes."

"I doubt that, Lot Haskins. But enough! The future lies in your hands. The hour is near at hand and you are in the web—you are the charmed bird within reach of the serpent's fangs. It all lies with you, I say."

Lot Haskins stepped free of the chair, and as he straightened he drew up one hand.

"I know what you hint at," he cried. "I know what you may do, but go and do it. I am going to keep my promise with Lura."

"No more."

Boston Bilkins fell back to the door, and from there looked into the tensely-drawn face of the man at the table.

"Then don't growl over what comes," he said. "Don't say that you were not warned. The ferrets are on the trail. They will in time unravel the Mystery of Madeline Meggs; they will open the closet and expose the skeleton there. The blow may fall sooner than you think. Don't growl, I say."

He was in the hallway with the last word on his lips.

The one eye had a light it had not had before. It regarded Haskins in a manner he had not noticed until that hour.

"I will see that a hand comes between you and this infamy. I will see that the power of the conspiracy is broken, and that the hand that took the life of Madeline Meggs is held up to the world."

"You will?"

"With the aid of the coolest, sharpest blood-hound in Gotham!"

Lot Haskins laughed. He recalled Captain Tunis's last words:

"The fox has been caged!"

Such words could have but one meaning.

The trap had closed on Gilt-Edge Damon!

"I accept the challenge. I pick up the gauntlet," he said. "I never expected to cross swords with you, but when you talk of conspiracy, you are liable to be regarded as one of the plotters."

Boston laughed and turned his back on the man in the library.

"One word," cried Haskins. "One bit of advice."

The convict turned and waited for him.

"Don't go too far with this game," he said. "Remember what you are. Don't forget that you are a jail-bird—a man who still owes the State four years of service."

"I won't say what you owe it; no, I'll not refer to that!" and the hand of the one-eyed man covered the face of the millionaire like a leveled revolver.

Lot Haskins seemed to recoil, but he did not speak.

Boston Bilkins reached the front door and threw it open with a quick, nervous jerk.

"Just as you please. The future is what you make it," and with this he vanished, leaving the nabob alone in the room where the strangest interview of his life had taken place.

For a minute, with knit brows and still white, he stood at the table, every now and then glancing at the door as if he expected his visitor to return, and all at once he sprung to the desk and snatched from its depths a revolver.

"I was a fool!" he said. "I had him at my mercy several times and we were the only tenants of this house. He came here on his own hook, and the secret of his coming was known to no people but ourselves. Fool! Lot Haskins, you have let an opportunity slip through your fingers—one which may not occur again."

He restored the weapon to the desk and sat down.

But he could not write. The pen he took up seemed to tremble in his hand.

"I will go in person. The hour is late, I know, but there will be wakeful eyes there. Why not to-morrow is her wedding day and—Yes, I will see her. I must!"

He went out, gliding along the almost deserted sidewalk and now and then seeming to look over his shoulder as if in search of a tracker.

But he saw none.

Lot Haskins, the millionaire of Gotham—the man in the toils of a tiger and his mate—did not use his eyes to a good purpose that night.

He could have seen some one on his trail. He could have seen the man who watched him every step he took; he could have picked out the bending, gliding figure of Captain Tunis, but he did not.

He might have gone over to the other side of the street if he had seen this man.

Yes, he might have resolved to break the cords of fate and defy the enemy ere it was too late.

CHAPTER XXII.

DAMON'S FAITHFUL LITTLE FRIEND.

The man with the single eye did not wait for the nabob to emerge from the mansion on the avenue.

Instead of shadowing the house from which he had escaped with his life, he went back to the lodgings where he had lived for years.

He was not known there as a convict, for there was nothing about him exteriorly to indicate that he had seen the inside of a prison, but he had seen all the horrors of jail life and was a prison-bird in everything the name implies.

It was an hour later and the light that burned on the rough table in the convict's room showed a recumbent form on a narrow cot in one corner.

The clocks of the city had struck the midnight hour and their shivering hands had started again upon the long run around the dial.

There came up the steps of the flight that led to the nest of the prison-bird a man who seemed to know exactly where he was going.

This person was dressed in dark clothes and when he had gained the top of the flight he took from beneath his coat a mask which he adjusted to his face, concealing it—all but the gleaming eyes that burned like twin stars in his head.

Nothing but a door separated him from the man from prison.

He took a key from his pocket and slipped it into the lock, but the door did not open.

"A bolt inside eh?" he said to himself. "Locked in like a death-sentenced man? That's it. He's no fool, this man isn't. He knows what is best—for himself!" and the last words seemed to end in a low laugh.

For some time the masked man tried the door, but it would not yield.

He tried key after key, but the bolt inside was what baffled him.

"Some other time. There is time enough yet," he said, falling back and slipping downstairs as slyly as he had ascended. "This man is very dangerous. He holds the whole game in his hands and he is inclined to be both merciless and ugly."

Down on the street the mask was removed and its wearer crept away under the lights.

"I'll see what has become of the other one," he went on when he reached a certain part of the city. "I will look in upon the other rat—the one we have caged. It won't take long and, besides, it's on my road."

Half an hour later he let himself into a house and shut the door carefully behind him.

He went to the end of the corridor and opened a door there.

Down a flight of ten steps he went and seemed to lean against a wall of stone.

Here again, though it was as dark as Erebus, he readjusted the mask and then struck a light.

Reaching up one hand he pressed a stone and it moved. In another moment there was a hole in the wall on a level with his head.

It was not large, but large enough to let him look into a cellar-like place which seemed lower than the floor where he stood.

The light he held threw its rays into this place and in a moment he was looking down upon a man who was regarding him in sullen silence and curiosity.

"Safe yet," said the masked man under his breath. "The rat is still in the trap. As I told Haskins, the fox is trapped."

For several moments it was look and look, and then the figure of the man in the chamber stepped from the wall and a hand went up.

"I know you. You need not cover your face with that rag. I see in your head the eyes of Captain Tunis, pirate and land robber. I see there the eyes of the man who years ago was concerned in more than one act of piracy and who later still tried his hand at a crime which shocked and mystified this city. Yes, Captain Tunis, though in a trap of your own setting, the game goes on. You can't hold back the hand of vengeance by closing in on me. The secret is in

other hands. It is known to those who will let it out and woe to the conspirators when the tale has been told!"

The man at the hole broke into a derisive laugh.

The black eyes twinkled and the unseen lips laughed defiance at the words of the man in the cell.

Suddenly the match went out and the hand of the hidden face threw it into the cell.

"I wanted to see if you were still safe," he said, and the stone, slipping noiselessly back to its place in the wall, seemed to shut off the prisoner's communication with the outside world, and the masked villain went back.

Gilt-Edge Dan, the ferret, was still in the toils.

He was still in the grip of the gold league, and could lean against the solid masonry of his cell, and reflect on the eyes he had seen, and wonder what would come next.

As for the man who had come to see him, he left the house, and went gliding back.

He turned up in another street, and stopped in front of the detective's office.

"I wonder if I would encounter the child there at this hour?" he said half-aloud.

He went up the stairs and halted at Damon's door.

This time he was more successful with his keys than he had been at the jail-bird's portals.

One of them let him inside, and in the faint glow thrown over the room by the dying fire in the grate he saw a childish figure recumbent in the spotter's chair.

Clova had overstayed her time, and was fast asleep.

There was something beautiful in the upturned face of the little sleeper, and Captain Tunis leaned forward and looked into it a full minute without moving.

"Looks like him, doesn't she?" he said half-aloud to himself. "I always thought so."

Then he fell back, and walking on tip-toe across the room, began to look everywhere as if hunting something of importance.

"He might have brought it to Gilt-Edge Damon, and that's what I want to know. He robbed me by surprising and choking Simon, and took the document from its niche in the wall. Did he bring it to Captain Damon? Did he carry it to the bloodhound of Gotham? It wasn't on his person when I trapped him. Is it in this room?"

But that which he looked for seemed to avoid him. He hunted everywhere, and appeared to forget that the room had an occupant besides himself.

He stopped at last and straightened.

A cry startled him, and looking toward the fire he discovered that little Clova had awakened and was sitting bolt upright in the detective's chair staring at him with her deep, wondrous blue eyes.

Captain Tunis who had no mask on his face this time, sprung across the room, and halted at the child's side.

She fell from him with a stifled exclamation of fright, and looked up into his face.

"Who are you?" she cried. "You are not Captain Dan, and I don't know how you came in here."

"Never mind that. I'm here, you see. You are his girl, aren't you?"

"I am Clova, and he lets me come here to warm. It is always cold in The Rookery, and that's why I come."

Captain Tunis, knowing where the ferret was, did not think it necessary to mince matters or to conceal anything.

"Where does he keep his private papers?" he asked.

Little Clova's look became a stare.

"He has sent me for them; he is after some people, for you know what he is—"

"Yes, a detective."

"That's right, and I'm helping him. He could not come himself, and so he sent me. He wants the papers he put away the other day in the secret place. He says you know where they are, and he tried to make it plain to me, but I've forgotten."

The look of the child became suspecting and suspicious.

She had never seen this man before, but she had heard footsteps come to the ferret's door, and might they not have been his?

"Where is he?" she asked.

"On the other side of the city. He wants the papers—wants them right away. I am with him. I am helping your friend to win a victory."

"You are?"

"Yes. We are following the trail together."

The figure of the child slid from the chair, and her feet touched the floor.

"I am going to win," said Captain Tunis to himself.

But all at once, with another look at him, Clova seemed to shrink within herself and his expectations got a setback.

"Come. We are in a hurry. I was not to stay long. I wish I could remember the directions he gave me, but they have slipped from my memory."

Clova suddenly thought that she had discov-

ered this man looking everywhere through the room like a robber. He had not tried to rouse her for the purpose of getting the secret papers, but had worked like a thief while she slept in the chair.

"Aren't you going to tell me where they are?" cried Captain Tunis, his face growing dark.

"I don't think I ought to," answered the child.

The next instant the hand of the man fell upon her arm and closed there like the talons of a hawk. Clova shrunk from the contact, and looked up into his face, which had changed in looks.

"We can't wait all night on you," he went on.

"Where are the papers, Clova?"

But there was no response. The child watched the eyes that regarded her and kept her lips sealed.

"This is too much!" grated Captain Tunis. "This will never do. I am here for those papers—the ones he keeps in the secret place, and you must not refuse to tell me where they are."

"But that wouldn't be right. I don't want to do anything to displease him."

"I am with him, I tell you."

"He never told me so."

Under the dark mustache Captain Tunis bit his lips.

"I won't let a child baffle me!" he cried. "I won't let this little chit cheat me out of a victory. The documents the one-eyed man took from my room are here. I will have them!"

He suddenly transferred his hand to Clova's throat, and though she tried to wrench herself from his grasp, she could not.

"Where are they?" he demanded. "Where are the papers he hides?"

"No, if he had sent you you wouldn't be so eager to get them," was the answer.

"Then, you don't intend to tell me where they are?"

"I—I can't and be true to Captain Dan."

The sudden shutting of Captain Tunis's hand threw the child's head back against the top of the chair.

"You won't eh? Then, take that little pinch!"

The child's eyes seemed to start from her head.

Captain Tunis stood erect, looking down upon her.

"She'll recollect that when she is an old woman!" he exclaimed, and with another look round the room he sprung away and went out the door.

Down the steps he went. Out upon the street, with the lights of Gotham in his face, and the room overhead had only poor little Clova, the ferret's best friend, for a tenant.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RAT ESCAPES.

It was true that Olive Haskins had left home.

Flying from the shadow of the future, shuddering at the thought that her father was about to bring to the house, as his wife, Lura, the Leopard Queen, of whom Jack had told her something, she had resolved to desert him for the present, and, as Lot Haskins had informed Captain Tunis, Olive was gone, and he knew not her hiding-place, though he believed that Parsons could tell if he could be found.

As for Jack, he had plainly told his late master that he had resolved to find Gilbert Haskins, the brother of the millionaire, but Lot had laughed at the idea that this convict was still living, though he had since discovered his error.

On the night when Captain Tunis was eager to see if the cage still held "the rat," Jack Parsons was on the street, and catching sight of the well-known figure of the man at the head of the plot, he followed him and saw him unlock the house that held the man in the trap.

Jack's eyes were on the alert, and for some time he was watching for Captain Tunis.

When he came out he caught sight of his face, and saw there a look of triumph.

"That man has something in that house," said the young man. "I can't find Gilt-Edge Damon, though I have been to his office twice, and little Clova can tell me nothing about him. Have they sprung the trap? Can it be that they have caged the man they don't like? I will see about this, Captain Tunis."

He let Captain Tunis go, and for some time continued to watch the place in hopes that the door would open and let him to the bottom of the mystery.

But nothing of the kind occurred.

"What if there is another leopard on guard?" said Jack to himself. "What if Captain Tunis is in the same business that Lura is, and what if he has left behind a guard as fierce as the one I was forced to kill in the beauty's parlor?"

Undaunted in spite of his thoughts, the young man managed to effect an entrance, and found the interior of the house as silent as the grave.

Every part of it was strange to him, and he went from room to room with a ready revolver clutched in his hand, for he felt that any place frequented by such a man as Captain Tunis was dangerous ground.

He found at last the steps leading to the door which opened into the narrow place from which

Captain Tunis had looked down into the detective's cage.

But there he stopped.

The door before him seemed to bar his progress, and for a moment he fell back and glared madly at it.

"Something is beyond that door," said Jack. "Some secret is there. Captain Tunis would not visit a deserted house. He has something here. I have found the trap; now, is it occupied?"

The young man was not to be frightened off by a door that seemed unyielding.

Though he went back and out of that house, he came to it again, and nearly an hour later stood once more where he had halted a short time previously.

This time he was prepared for the work ahead, and in a short time the stubborn lock yielded and he stood in the stone corridor.

"Nothing but stone, eh?" he exclaimed. "This is strange. I don't see any door here," and he ran his match up and down the place without discovering anything that rewarded him.

All at once he started and leaned against the wall at his right.

He had caught a sound.

"What was that?" asked Jack. "I heard a voice; I know I did, and it seemed to come through this very wall."

He ran his matches along the wall again, and suddenly started to see a stone that seemed to be loose.

In another instant the torch had stopped, and he was where the stone seemed loose.

Jack Parsons threw his matches to the floor and began to work on the stone.

"Who is there?" said a voice beyond the wall.

"Heavens!" cried Jack. "Who is there?"

There was a laugh as the unseen speaker seemed to recognize the young man's voice and the next moment Jack Parsons knew that he had found the rat in the trap.

"Well, this is luck and no mistake," said the young man. "I thought I wasn't tracking the wily Captain Tunis for nothing, but I did not expect to find you in durance, Captain Dan."

"Well, I'm here as snug as a bug in a rug, but not quite so comfortable," laughed the ferret. "You can't get to me by the route you are trying now unless the removal of one stone means the removal of more."

"It means that."

"Then, go ahead and if I can help you I will."

Jack Parsons found that the stone he had removed was not the only one that could be taken from the wall, though the others were not inclined to yield to his efforts, and at last, after an hour's hard work, he could reach down and touch Gilt-Edge Dan's hand.

Then came the tug of war, both men working in unison, and when they stood together in the dark corridor which Jack Parsons had penetrated, several hours had fled, but the work was done.

The rat was really out of the trap; the victim of Captain Tunis's cunning was at liberty to turn the tables on that villain, and when he looked into Jack Parsons's face and assured him that he would not be forgotten for his services, there was a smile that meant more than words.

"Out of the trap!"

There was much in these words as they fell from the lips of the rescued detective.

Gilt-Edge Dan stood in the old house and for some moments looked at the man who had rescued him while he told all he knew about affairs as they had happened lately at the millionaire's mansion.

"To-morrow the wedding takes place," said Jack. "To-morrow is near at hand. If you are not going to let this go on you haven't much time."

"What, the wedding? Why not?" said Gilt-Edge Dan. "Why not let Lura become Mrs. Haskins?"

"Just as you say," smiled Jack. "I don't like the thought of this woman occupying the place once occupied by Olive's mother. The girl is out of the house; she has fled to escape the tyranny of this new and terrible relationship. I am looking for Gilbert Haskins. I am hunting for Lot Haskins's brother—the man who went to prison and who was unjustly convicted years ago."

"Do you think he killed Madeline Miggs?"

"I don't know, but I think not. I can't say hardly what I do think, so much has happened within the last few days; but I have told Lot Haskins that I leave his service to hunt down this convict whom he believes dead."

There was no reply for a moment and Jack Parsons watched the face of the detective as he looked toward the door like a man in deep study.

"I'll go home," he said at once. "I'll go back to the den and from there strike the blow."

"Between now and to-morrow?"

"I can't say. I may come between them and I may not. I am running down the hand which took the life of Madeline Miggs."

"And you have a clew?"

The detective seemed to lean toward the young man. His face for a moment lit up with satisfaction, but all at once it became as immo-

bile as ever and was the sphinx-like face Jack had seen before.

"Let time tell you what I have discovered," he said. "I am still on the trail that came to me the night of the 27th and I will not quit it until I have found the end thereof. Yes, I will go home."

They left the old house one at a time and separated some distance away.

"He sha'n't be disappointed in his love or his ambition if I can help him," muttered the ferret, watching Jack out of sight as he stood for a little while where they had parted. "He broke the jaws of the trap and I am a free man—free to hunt down the hand that took the life of Madeline Miggs and free to break up the most diabolical plot ever hatched in the human brain. I will do it! In spite of the conspiracy—in spite of Captain Tunis and Lura, the Leopard Queen, I will get to the end of the trail!"

Gilt-Edge Dan reached his old place and ran up the stairs with an eagerness that might have betrayed him to cunning and suspicious eyes.

He was not aware that he was but little behind Captain Tunis; he did not dream that the man who had trapped him had just left this room, nor was he prepared for the sight that met his gaze when he opened his door.

The fire had gone down and the room was almost dark.

Still, there was just light enough to show him the well known figure of little Clova in the chair, and when he stole forward on tip-toe, so as not to waken the child, a strange cry welled from his throat.

"My God! the child is dead!"

Gilt-Edge Dan struck a light and turned on the gas.

He bent over the little figure in the chair and looked with staring eyes into the face thrown back and at the hands which had clutched the chair arms as if in dreadful agony.

But little Clova was not dead.

The hard, cruel pinch given by Captain Tunis had not deprived her of life, though it had rendered her unconscious, and when the detective discovered that she was still his living friend, he smiled and sent heavenward his most fervent thanks.

Out of the dark, deep swoon which so admirably counterfeited death came the child much, to the ferret's joy, and when she could talk her first words were:

"Is he gone? Did he take anything, Captain Dan?"

"Who was here?" asked the ferret eagerly as he took a seat beside little Clova and held her hand. "Tell me all about him and then I will see if anything is missing."

She told him all she remembered.

"I know him. He thought he had me but up in a death-trap and that he would rob me with impunity. Ah! I will get even with this man. I will find him at the end of this dark trail of mine. Yes, he will be there, Clova."

"I hope so and that when you find him you won't let him get away."

Damon said nothing, but shut his lips and his look was enough.

The child went home. It was past midnight when she reached The Rookery, but Captain Dan said "good-night" to her at the foot of the steps and turned away.

"Worth her weight in gold," he said to himself with a smile on his face. "So Captain Tunis was looking for the paper Boston took from his room? So he wanted to find it and he took a sleek plan to get it, too. But the child was true to me. She didn't know where the paper was, but she would not even tell him where I kept some of my most valuable things. Yes, Clova is worth her weight in gold."

Once more he went back to his room.

The fire had gone out and the room was cold, but the detective did not notice this.

"I wonder how she is coming on?" said a man in the street as he looked up and saw the light in the ferret's den. "I wonder if I did pinch her too hard. No, I don't think I did, though she is but a child and has a tender throat."

The speaker went to the open hall and was about to ascend to the detective's room when he took another notion.

"Let her go. I have business elsewhere. I have other work to do, for to-morrow is the great day. To-morrow we fasten the clamps on the man we have in the web. To-morrow Lura becomes a wife and after that date the stakes belong to us!"

He fell back, looked up at the lighted window once more and went off.

If he had gone up-stairs a surprise would have been his.

If he had looked over the transom of Captain Damon's room and seen the man sitting before the fire a cry of astonishment might have parted his lips.

But he did not go up.

He did not look back the second time, therefore he knew nothing of what had happened. He might have gone up those steps and discovered that "the rat" was out of the underground trap and ready for "to-morrow."

But Captain Tunis turned the nearest corner ignorant of all this; he vanished not knowing that the enemy of the plot was still on the trail.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRAIL OF THE TRUTH.

MEANTIME in a small town some thirty miles from New York, and buried among the hills of New Jersey, lived a man who was ill at ease, and at the same time a sort of human mystery to the people with whom he had taken up his residence.

Epsom Tibbets, the money-shark, flying from the shadow of the dark crime of the night of the 27th, had found a nest where he thought he was safe.

Safe from whom?

He hated the reporters and the detectives. He had been bothered to death by them, and he thought that by flying from the city he would not be discovered, and that he would never be called upon to testify in open court about the scenes he had witnessed in his own den.

Captain Tunis had hastened his flight, as we have seen. He had imbued the old man with a new fear, and while he had found a new biding-place, he felt that he was not quite secure, for Captain Tunis, if so minded, might tell on him, and bring down upon him the very persons he wanted to avoid.

The place where he had stopped was not on the railroad. It was a quiet spot some distance from the iron track, and the house where he had found rest was a queer-looking, old-fashioned affair, a relic of the last century, with a long sloping roof, which began at the window of his room and dropped almost, to the ground.

It was the night of the scenes we have just witnessed, and Epsom Tibbets sitting in his room with the shutters drawn, and the lights low, was going slowly over some writing he had just finished.

The ground was white with snow, and the winds over in the nearest hollow had just quieted down, and were asleep at last.

The old broker looked like a hunted man.

His face had grown more cadaverous since landing in that particular spot.

His hands seemed longer, and more like skeleton hands. There was a half-frightened look in his eyes, and whenever he glanced toward the door, or looked to see if the windows were secure, he seemed to shudder as if a step had startled him.

It was near midnight, and he had been working at that paper since sundown. He had started half a dozen, to destroy them one after another, and there was a heap of ashes on his hearth.

Epsom Tibbets was in good shape to be frightened by any kind of noise, and when he suddenly heard one that seemed to come from the windows looking out upon the roof, he sprung up, but halted in the middle of the room, and stared and shivered.

Hunted men will do this. They see in the faintest shadows the hand of justice, and in the faintest sound hear the feet of doom.

Epsom Tibbets continued to stand in the middle of the room until one of the shutters opened.

He was not dreaming. It had opened.

At the pane appeared a face from which the man fell back, and with glaring eyes looked at it, with his nails eating their way into his almost fleshless palms.

"In God's name, where did that man come from?" cried Epsom Tibbets, as he gazed. "What brings him to me? I have seen that mouth before, but it can't belong to him. No, he is dead. They say he was destroyed the time the convicts revolted. Haskins believes him dead, and the authorities reported him so after the revolt."

A hand came up and raised the sash, and the first thing Tibbets knew he had a visitor.

Near him stood a man who had but one eye in his head.

He had seen that person spring into the room and land within a few feet of him, and had noticed, too, that one shoulder drooped in a strange manner.

"Ghost or devil, what do you want?" Tibbets managed to say at last, and his voice seemed to have a good deal of courage in it, despite his apparent fright.

The old shark's visitor came toward him and stopped near the table.

"I'll sit, if you have no objection. It's a long walk from the track. I thought the wind would carry me off at times."

Tibbets wished it had. Yes, he wished it had blown this man across the State and dumped him into the sea.

"You want to see me, do you?" asked the hidden broker.

"If I wanted to see the President of the United States, do you think I would come here?" was the reply.

"Evidently not. Don't see why you should. The President don't keep this sort of a house. I hope he never will."

Tibbets had gone back to his old method of snapping off his sentences like pistol-shots.

"You've been at work, I see," said the caller, looking at the pile of sheets on the table.

"Yes. One has to do something here to keep his mind employed."

"Haven't you anything else to keep yours at work?" grinned the man, and the one eye seemed to laugh.

"Might find something. Might; that's a fact."

"The murder of Miggs, for instance," suggested the stranger.

"Miggs! My God, are you here to talk about her? Don't want to hear a word about that woman. Might have died elsewhere, you know."

"If you hadn't money, she might have gone to another shark," was the answer. "She knew you dealt in money and human souls."

"How's that?"

"I beg your pardon, Tibbets. I don't want to offend you, but dealing in money at ruinous rates of interest is like dealing in human souls. Looks that way to me, at any rate; but that's neither here nor there."

"That's a fact."

"How are you getting along here, Tibbets?" he asked.

"Pretty well. I think I could live here if this was the only place in the world."

"You don't have many callers?"

"Not many."

"Am I the first?"

"Perhaps you are."

"The reporters haven't found you, eh? Nor the detectives?"

"Not yet."

"But I have. Yes, I have ferreted you out. You don't know me, Tibbets?"

"Yes, but I do—that is, if what they have said about you is all a lie."

"A lie! How's that?"

Tibbets who still stood at the edge of the table while his visitor had seated himself, looked down into the face waiting anxiously for his reply and seemed to smile.

"I say if what they have said about a certain man is a lie, you are that person," he said.

"Well?"

"You are Gilbert Haskins."

The one-eyed man passed his hand over his face and let it fall softly on the table.

"Do you think so, Tibbets?" he asked. "Why, they call me Boston Bilkins."

"That may be and it may be your right name, too, but I only said the other in a half-guessing way."

"You seem to have a good memory. You haven't forgotten the trial in the South. They once thought you had a hand in taking the diamonds. They thought so, you know, for you were fond of the sparklers and Madeline had some that would have made any one's eyes water."

"That's a fact; they were very fine."

"You've seen them since those times?"

"Yes, as every one knows, I saw them the night she was killed in my office."

"She was going to leave them as security for a loan of five hundred, eh?"

"She was."

Boston Bilkins looked at the money-shark some time without speaking, then he said slowly:

"I am Gilbert Haskins, Tibbets. I am the man supposed by the State to be a dead man, whose life went out the night of the celebrated revolt. I am the man who was sent up by a false oath. I am the man who sealed his lips, and let them send him to prison—who let them smirch his record and destroy his good name. You know it all. You stood in that court-room and heard everything. You took the witness stand and helped me over the road."

"I—I—"

"There, don't get excited. I know what I'm talking about, and you know that up to this time I have not made a single misstatement. Yes, you swore pretty hard against me, Tibbets," Boston went on. "You didn't seem to be troubled with any compunctions of conscience those days. You had a little wife, but you didn't care for her very much, else you would not have deserted her since."

"She didn't treat me well."

"No, you wanted money, money, and because she had a heart that didn't beat all the time to the tune of gold, you ran off and left her; but that's neither here nor there."

Tibbets felt glad it was not. He did not like to hear of the deserted Mrs. Tibbets.

"Well, Tibbets, you were in a pretty box for awhile. They found Madeline Miggs dead in your office, and the diamonds gone," continued Boston.

"Yes. I didn't get to retain them on loan."

"It would have helped you out of a hole, eh? You got gored by the bulls, didn't you? But look here. Let me see what you have been writing."

Tibbets caught at the sheets of paper on the table, but the hand of the one-eyed man was a little too quick for him, and captured two of them.

"Ha! a sketch of your life, or so much of it as you see fit to tell to clear yourself of all suspicion concerning the death of Miggs."

The one eye shone like a diamond while its owner talked.

Tibbets said nothing.

"You'll write a little for me," said Boston. "Sit down, Epsom."

There was a command in the voice which seemed backed by a power which the listener could not resist.

The lank body of the money shark dropped into his chair, and he looked across the table and at the man who had come to him like a ghost from the dead.

"You will write a retraction of what you swore to on the trial of Gilbert Haskins for robbery."

"Wha—what?" stammered Tibbets.

"You heard me. You always had good ears, and I happen to know that their usefulness has not become impaired. Write out a retraction in your own style, and I will see how it suits me."

The hand of Tibbets moved toward the pen, and in another moment he was poised it over the inkstand.

"What are you going to do with my confession?" he asked.

"Never mind that. I want it; that's enough for the present."

Boston, the convict, sunk back into the depths of his chair and looked at the terrified money shark.

"Why don't you go on, man?" he suddenly cried. "I am here for what belongs to me. I am here for my honor. I am clearing it up after all these years."

Tibbets bit what little lip he had and began to write.

He made the retraction short, but clear and ample. He had a way of doing things well when he chose to.

"That's all right," said Boston, with a glance at the writing. "I am satisfied. Now, who, think you, killed Miggs?"

The old man nearly dropped the pen.

"How should I know?" he said, with a hitch in his voice.

"But you have an idea. You must know that she was killed by some enemy."

"That's reasonable."

"The man who killed her—we will say 'the man' at any rate—took the diamonds."

"Yes."

"You know something about Miggs's past, Tibbets. You saw her married to Lot Haskins. You know all about the famous trial by which I was sent over the road. You ought to know who might have been the woman's enemy."

"I only know of one person who ever promised to 'get even' with her."

Boston Bilkins did not smile; he only looked at Tibbets.

"And that person was—"

"You, yourself!" said Tibbets. "You swore in court, and with uplifted hand, that some day you would get even with her for swearing as she had."

CHAPTER XXV.

BETWEEN DARKNESS AND DAYLIGHT.

THERE was something in the eye that regarded Epsom Tibbets, after his last words, that startled him.

He had expected the man to leap across the table and clutch at his throat, but he did nothing of the kind.

The jail-bird—the self-acknowledged prison imp—sat still, and merely gazed at him with the single eye that seemed to look him through.

"I did say that," said Boston Bilkins at last. "I did stand up, as you say, and tell her that some day I would get even with her for that testimony."

"Of course you did. The whole crowd heard you."

"Yes. Well, she is dead now, and I could not carry out my threat if I wanted to."

What was Tibbets thinking about?

Yes, Madeline Miggs was dead; she had been murdered in his office, and undoubtedly by some one who was her enemy.

"Look here, Tibbets. Do you think I carried out my threat?" suddenly asked the ex-convict.

"Fact is, I never thought much about it. You know I had to think about my own business, and therefore this strange mystery never bothered me much."

"But you hadn't forgotten what I said that day in court?"

"No. I guess all who heard you remember what you said—that is, all those who are living."

"Certainly."

The jail-bird fingered the paper he had forced from Tibbets and seemed to think that he had won a substantial victory.

"When are you going back to the city?" he asked.

Epsom Tibbets seemed to recoil.

"I don't want to go at all."

"No? You are satisfied here, eh?"

"Not exactly that, but I don't want to be dragged deeper into this unpleasant affair. You'll never call me up now that you have what you came hither for?"

"I've got all I want, but there are others who might want to see you."

"The detectives?"

"Others still, Tibbets."

"I don't understand you."

"What, you don't, eh, and still you claim to be able to think a little? There is Captain Tunis for instance—"

"To perdition with Captain Tunis!" broke in the old money shark.

"You don't like him, I see."

"I never did."

"Well, there is Lura."

"I don't know Lura."

"Not under that name perhaps, but you know her all the same. Next, there is Lot Haskins, my distinguished brother."

A smile overspread Tibbets's face, but it soon vanished.

"I didn't see much of him. I never had him for a customer."

"That is true, but did you know that he was quite near you the night of the 27th?"

"Near me?"

"Yes, but let that pass. Lastly, there is Gilt-Edge Damon."

"The Wonder-Sharp!" said Tibbets. "I thought you would name him before you got through. I don't want to see him."

"But you went to him with story of the killing of Madeline Miggs."

"I did. I knew of no other person who was good at solving riddles. I hope Damon will get to the bottom of the mystery, but, as I have said, I don't want to see him. You won't tell him where I am, will you?"

"Not if you don't want the secret out, Tibbets. But, look here. You have said that I threatened to get even with Miggs. That means that I might have killed her."

The one black eye was riveted upon Tibbets and the hand of its owner had crept over the edge of the table like the head of a serpent.

"I never said that I had an opinion about that killing. I've had too many opinions during my life for my own good. I don't say that you killed Miggs, but if you did I don't thank you for doing it where you did, and to the ruin of my business."

Boston Bilkins broke out in a laugh.

"A fine business you had and perfectly legitimate—in the eyes of the devil and his imps," he said. "But I don't fault you, Tibbets. It is wolf eat wolf nowadays, and if you are the better wolf and can devour the rest of the pack, why, all right. But I didn't kill Miggs. I'll give you my word on that."

"Who did?"

Tibbets saw his visitor fall back and grin.

"Do you think I would be here telling you if I knew? Don't you suppose I would either tell it to Gilt-Edge Dan, or else keep it to myself after what that woman did to me in the South? I don't say that I know who killed Miggs, but—"

The man stopped as if treading on dangerous ground or near the threshold of a secret and for some moments did not speak again.

"I guess I'll go," he said at last, rising and drawing up the drooping shoulder.

Tibbets said nothing. He did not want to detain this man; on the other hand, he wanted him out of the house and as far away as possible.

He saw Boston Bilkins, or Gilbert Haskins, glide toward the window with feelings of relief.

He watched him put one leg across the sill and then creep out upon the roof.

"You'll run off again, won't you, Tibbets?" said the convict, looking back.

"Not if I'm not molested any further," was the reply.

"Very well. Good-night."

The body of the jail-bird slipped toward the edge of the roof, and Tibbets watched it drop over the snow-covered eaves and vanish.

"Gone at last!" he cried, shutting the shutters and coming back to the table with a shiver. "In God's name, how did that man know where I was? Who told him that I dropped down into this place and that I was writing out my account of the Miggs affair? He must have dreamed it out or be in league with devil. Can I trust him? Trust a convict? Trust a man like him—a man who might, after all, be the one wanted by the detective for the murder of Madeline Miggs? I don't know."

Meantime the one-eyed man was flitting down a white road and had turned his face toward the nearest station.

It was miles away, but he went over the cold road with the speed of a man with justice at his heels, and when he saw the light in the little depot he slackened his gait and crept upon the building with the caution of a hunted man.

He crouched in the shadows till he heard the shriek of a locomotive and caught the flaring light of the engine.

The train lumbered up to the station and stopped for half a minute, but that was long enough for the man in lurking.

A shadow came out of the darkness and boarded the train: a man took a seat in the smoker and the train bore him off.

Some time later, when the night was verging into another day, this man appeared in New York.

He first went to the little room he occupied and looked at the paper he had forced from Epsom Tibbets, then he placed it back in his bosom and smiled his satisfaction.

"That wasn't a water-haul," he said with un-

concealed delight. "It wasn't a fool trip into the wilds of Jersey. I got something for my trouble. I drew some blood from a turnip."

Yes, he had.

"This is the day," he went on. "Though it is not yet light, this is the day set apart for the consummation of the plot. Lura is to become the wife of Lot Haskins unless some one comes between. That is it. Unless some one comes between."

Once more Boston Bilkins, as we will still call him, went down upon the street.

The sidewalks were deserted.

The light fell upon no one and he heard no footsteps but his own.

In a short time it would not be so.

In a short time New York would be awake and her thousands would be on the move again.

The jail-bird, with Epsom Tibbets's confession nearest his heart, moved away.

He went up one street and down another. At last he stopped in front of a plain house which had no light at all, showing that its inmates still slept the deep sleep which falleth upon man.

"She's in there. Shall I?" he asked himself aloud.

Presently he drew near the door and rang the bell.

No answer.

He rang again and then drew back as if about to leave the spot.

There were footsteps in the hall and he seemed to smile to himself.

The door opened and the convict caught sight of a woman's face.

"What is it?"

"I want to see the little woman who came here some time ago."

"The little woman, eh?"

"Yes."

"But she's asleep. It isn't morning yet—"

"Yes it is. You mean it isn't light yet."

"But couldn't you—"

"No, I couldn't," broke in Boston. "I want to see her. Tell her I will wait till she dresses. I am not going away till I've seen her; she can make up her mind to that."

"I'll tell her," and the frightened woman went off, having seen but little of her caller, not enough to describe him to the person whom she startled from her slumbers.

At the end of ten minutes the jail-bird was told that he could walk up-stairs. He did so and into a room which the landlady designated from the foot of the flight.

"Merciful heavens!" cried the person to whom he appeared.

"Don't. I'm not here to frighten you. You have seen my face before. You saw me at the window of the den where your husband lived for awhile and when you were talking to Gilt-Edged Dan, the detective. I am not here to trouble you very much. I have come to tell you where you may find your delectable husband if you really want to find him—"

"Tibbets!"

"Epsom Tibbets. Then, I want you to sign a paper for me."

"A paper?"

"Yes, I have it written out. You testified on my trial. You said you saw me in the yard the night Madeline lost her diamonds."

"But—"

"I know they paid you for it. I know that Lot Haskins paid you for what you testified to, and then, as your husband was suspected by some, you were quite willing to get me into the fire and him out of it."

Little Maggie Tibbets was looking at the man who stood before her.

"You've lost some of your old looks."

"And one of my old eyes, eh?" he smiled. "I'm not as handsome as I was and I would make a very homely seraph. But here's the document."

She leaned toward her little lamp and read what he had written out.

"I'll sign that," she said. "But you finally carried out your threat, didn't you?"

He said nothing, but looked at her for a moment while she put her name to the paper.

"They don't suspect you, do they?" she said, when she had finished signing.

"You don't think I killed Madeline Miggs, woman?"

"You know what you said in court."

"Yes."

"Well, Gilbert Haskins, who else wanted to take that woman's life?"

This was a poser.

The jail-bird shut his hands, and his one eye seemed to start from its socket as he went toward the little woman, now as cool as she could be, in the middle of the room.

"Who did it? Who wanted her blood, do you ask me?" he asked. "You want to know who else would kill Madeline Miggs. Why, who but the person most interested in her death? I am not that person. I don't expect to marry Lot Haskins before another night comes on."

With a cry which she could not suppress, Mrs. Tibbets fell back and gazed at the speaker.

"You don't accuse her, do you?" she cried.

"Think! Isn't she most interested in Madeline Miggs's death? She knew where the wife

was lurking, and if Miggs had lived there would have been a reconciliation."

Mrs. Tibbets did not speak.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SILENT WITNESS.

IT was near daylight when Lot Haskins, opening his door with the latch-key, let himself into his mansion and went direct to his library.

He had not been there since his interview with Boston Bilkins, whom he now knew as Gilbert Haskins.

He staggered forward into a chair, and sat there like a man in a maze.

"I didn't get much satisfaction out of her, and she will hold me to the compact," he said, aloud. "I told her the whole story, and she sat and smiled. I begin to believe that the detective told the truth—that I am in the toils. I begin to see how deep in them I am. I have lost my child, and Gilbert Haskins has come back from the dead to imbitter my life. I have made a hellish compact with this Captain Tunis. I have given him my word that he shall become Olive's husband, and I have promised to bring into this house, as my wife, Lura Lorel, the handsome beauty of the avenue. That is what I have done. Shall I carry out the compact? Shall I keep my word with them?"

The echo of his voice was the only answer he received, and for a little time he sat there in the deep chair and reflected, while the color changed on his face and his hands seemed to shake.

"The ferret is in the trap," he went on. "Captain Tunis has assured me that the man who is working up the mystery of Madeline Miggs is out of the way, and cannot confront me with his suspicions. That is something, but still I am in the snare."

At that moment a clock on the mantel to the millionaire's right struck three.

The silvery tones still reverberated through the room when a noise that startled him, caused him to turn in the chair, and he was face to face with Captain Tunis.

A shudder seemed to pass over the nabob's frame.

The man of plots came forward with the gliding movement of a tiger, and Haskins bit his lip as he regarded him.

"Well, we are on the top wave," said the dark-faced man, rubbing his soft, silken hands. "We will soon be where we can defy them all, and with you happy with a beautiful wife, we can look forward to a golden future full of promise, and years of joy."

It chilled Haskins to hear this man talk thus.

"Any news of Olive yet?" asked Captain Tunis, and before the millionaire could speak, he continued, "no, I suppose you have none, but that's no matter. We'll find her in a few days, though I would like to see her greet your wife when you bring her home."

"I'm afraid it would be an icy greeting."

"Perhaps, but Lura's smiles, and demeanor would soon thaw her out, and then we would have peace and happiness where it should exist if anywhere in this world—beneath this very roof."

Lot Haskins looked at the man who stood at his side, with a newly lighted cigar between his thin, sensual lips, and then caught the steely glitter that animated his eyes.

The nabob was laboring under a mental strain. He attempted twice to talk before he succeeded, and when he did his voice had a strange sound.

"I have seen him—alive," he said.

Captain Tunis did not start.

"You have seen who alive?" he merely said.

"Gilbert Haskins."

"Pish! man."

"But I have. I am not mistaken," was the reply.

"You've been dreaming again."

"He was here—in this room. I stood face to face with him. I heard him talk."

"Why didn't he turn up before this?"

"I don't know. He has been living under an assumed name. He is an escaped convict."

"He couldn't well be anything else," smiled Captain Tunis. "This brother of yours went to prison, and died there. The prisoners took a notion to revolt once, and he was burned to death when they fired the prison."

"He was terribly burned, but managed to escape. He has but one eye, and his shoulder is all out of shape—"

"What, is this the man you believe to be Gilbert Haskins?" cried Captain Tunis.

"That is the man."

"Why, I know him. I have seen him. He is a common thief. He holds people up and robs them. He has robbed me."

"Lately?"

"Lately. If I had come home a little sooner, there would have been a dead jail-bird in my house."

"You don't know where he is, I suppose?"

"Don't I?" and Captain Tunis seemed to bend over until his eyes appeared to flash on the millionaire's cheek. "I know where this man hides. I can go out now, and before it is light put my hands on him. And so he claims to be Gilbert Haskins?"

"His claim is just. He is Gilbert Haskins."

"What proof had he?"

"The scar of the cut I gave him when we were boys. He showed me that, and it was enough. I wanted no other proof."

"Well, well! This is in the nature of a revelation. I'll see about this man."

"You will?"

"Yes. I have caged the fox, and I can cage this pretender."

"But he is no pretender. He is my brother."

"Have it as you please," smiled Captain Tunis. "But let's get away from this subject. It is almost time."

"I know it."

"You will soon have an angel in the house. Lura may not come here at once, for she has told you that the ceremony is to be secret, but that within a week it is to be published, and all the city will know that once more you are a Benedict."

There was no reply to these words.

Did Captain Tunis see the hands under the table shut and clinched there? Did he notice that Haskins's face grew white, and that he seemed to shrink into the depths of his chair?

"By the way, I thought best to bring you this," he said, producing a small pocket-knife, at which Haskins started violently. "I don't want you to enter into this marriage with anything to disturb your happiness."

The millionaire was looking at the knife which he knew was his, and which he had missed for days.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

"You lost it, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"Where do you think I found it?" smiled the bland villain.

"I could not guess."

"Perhaps not. When did you first miss this knife?"

"It was some days ago."

"Was it on the night of the 27th?"

There was no reply.

Captain Tunis was looking straight into the nabob's face and their eyes met.

"Where did you get my knife? That is what I want to know," said Haskins.

"Really, do you now?" grinned the man. "Are you so very anxious to know where I found this knife? for find it I did and just where it was dropped."

Haskins sat like a person glued to his chair.

"I found this knife in a peculiar place," continued Captain Tunis without lowering his voice one whit. "I picked it up where it was dropped by its owner. Where? Is that what you want to know, Lot Haskins? I found it in the hall leading to Epsom Tibbets's den—the one he occupied the night Madeline Miggs went out of the world so unexpectedly to herself and the general public."

There was no start. The listener seemed to lose every vestige of color; the hand he had lifted for the purpose of receiving the knife from Captain Tunis fell to his side and he sat like one suddenly stricken with paralysis.

"Come! I didn't expect to startle you," said the villain with the same bland smile that characterized him when he was playing a deep game to further his own diabolical ends. "Really, I didn't expect to give you a shock. I hope—"

"Did you find it there?" said Haskins. "Come, tell me the solid truth. Was it found in the hallway?—my knife?"

"When did I ever lie to you?" cried the dark-faced man with an offended air. "Tell me the time when you caught Captain Tunis in a lie and I will give you my head."

"I have never caught you in one, my friend—"

"But you don't want to think that you lost your knife in that hall nor on that particular night."

"I don't want to think anything about it."

"Well, I found it there and I think it devilish lucky that no one else picked it up."

The knife fell upon the table before the nabob and he watched it for a time with an inward shudder.

"But I didn't touch her," he said, turning to Captain Tunis. "I didn't open the broker's door that night. I went to that building for another purpose."

"Yes, we believe you; but what would the man-hunter say? You went thither for another purpose, but she died there that very night and she was your wife!"

Once more the hands of Haskins fell back. He turned from the cool Satanic face of Captain Tunis with another shudder.

"I don't see how you lost your knife there unless you had it out of your pocket and what would you have it out for in that place?"

"Don't! for God's sake leave me. I would rather be alone. Stay! I thank you for returning the knife though I would thank you just as much if you had thrown it into the river."

There was no pity in the eyes that watched Haskins. They seemed to gloat over him as a tigress gloats over the fawn in her claws and just before destruction.

"I did not care to throw it away," he said, glancing at the knife. "I thought best to bring it to you as then it would be a lesson for the

future. If the detectives had found it there they might have made things unpleasant for you."

"Simple as it seems, it might have hanged an innocent man."

The black mustache seemed to curl with derision.

"Yes, very many innocent men are hanged nowadays."

Lot Haskins groaned.

Captain Tunis fell back as if about to leave the room when the millionaire looked him full in the face.

"Do you think I did it?" he said. "Do you think, even though you say you found my knife in that hall, that my hand hastened the death of my child's mother?"

Haskins had risen to his feet and was standing erect before the handsome man from the South.

"I must have an answer. I must have a decisive reply. I lost my knife that night. I may have lost it where my wife was murdered. Do you think I killed her?"

Captain Tunis was as cool as a desperado of the first water.

He neither quavered or looked askance. He eyed Haskins with his dark orbs, unvexed and unexcited.

"I make no charges," he said at last. "I have said nothing against you, but what would the authorities think? As yet they don't know that you were that woman's husband. What if the detectives knew that you were? Why, that knife found where I found it, would hang you and you know it."

"But I say it never touched her. I say that I did not kill her that night."

"But you saw her, didn't you? I found that knife at the door leading into old Tibbets's den."

Haskins took a long breath and shivered.

What a terrible witness that knife was!

He looked at it and then at the cool-head near him in the middle of the room.

"I went to that building that night. I was in the ball. I knew that my wife was in Epsom Tibbets's office; but that is all."

"What took you to that place?"

"I refuse to tell you or any other man. I utterly refuse to say. That is my secret," and with this he dropped back into his chair and covering his face with his hands, leaned forward on the table and groaned.

Captain Tunis looked at him a moment, and gliding across the room, opened the door and went out with the smile of a fiend lurking at his lips.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LEOPARDESS IS ROBBED.

IN the house of the beautiful woman who was soon to become the wife of Lot Haskins, all was still.

The clock ticking on the marble mantel sent forth a sound that roused no one, and the light burning in the richly-furnished room where Jack Parsons had killed the leopardess, threw its glare over the sumptuous furniture and the soft velvet carpet.

In another room, which was to be found on the ground floor and not far from the parlor, slept the owner of this magnificence.

Lura had retired at last after being up till after midnight, and, satisfied that she was to become a bride on the morrow, was dreaming of the success of the deep plot for gold, and was unconscious of the shadow then beneath her roof.

It was nearly three in the morning—that hour when the whole city is wrapped in slumber—and the house of the leopardess was as silent as the graves in Greenwood.

The clock had just struck the hour, and the door leading to the parlor opened.

The person who came in with silken tread was not the owner of the house.

No, it was not the tall, handsome woman who, with Captain Tunis, had plotted as never woman before her had.

A man crossed the threshold of the rich room.

His face was concealed by a mask of close-fitting silk and his hands were gloved.

He stopped in the light of the gas and took a look at the room.

Beneath the mask his eyes shone like stars, and there was something about them that told that where his lips were a smile lurked.

This person shut the door behind him and crossed the room.

He looked at the red curtains that shut off that little apartment to which Lura retired when she wanted to write, and going thither, he parted them and vanished.

In the room beyond he turned on the gas and revealed its appointments, which were in keeping with those in other parts of the house.

He looked at the heavy but handsome private desk in one corner, and approached it with the tread of the burglar.

Taking a key from his pocket, the masked man tried to open the desk, and after several trials, succeeded.

When he threw back the lid, he seated himself coolly at the desk and began to ransack it, but in a systematic manner.

He did not remove anything that he did not replace in a remarkable way. Everything touched was restored to its old place, and for some minutes he went through the desk, looking for something which seemed to elude him.

All this time he said nothing to himself, though he was thinking deeply, and nothing escaped his watchful eyes.

By and by he left the room, having closed and locked Lura's desk, and in a few seconds he turned up in another apartment, where he looked into an *escritoire*.

At last he approached a door, which he eyed with the cunning of a hawk.

"I wonder if she has locked herself in?" he said, in tones that stirred the thin mask he wore. "I would like to know if she is asleep, or does she lie awake and gloat over the coming triumph? I will see."

What, is this strange man—this midnight prowler—about to invade the sanctity of Lura's boudoir?

He is going to do nothing less than this.

He tries the door and finds that it yields to his touch.

In a moment he has crossed the step of that room, and the light which bathes it in shaded splendor falls upon a couch upon which lies Lura fast asleep.

The black eyes in the mask shine anew.

Their owner bends forward, and for a time looks at the sleeper with a cunning stare.

He is but a few feet from the curtained couch. He gazes upon the full, beautiful face of the Queen of the Leopard, and then falls back with a hasty look at her jewel case on the stand.

Lura may be dreaming of trouble, but her face shows it not. She may have visions of pleasure and of triumph, but she does not waken to see the intruder at the stand.

Presently the intruder turns and parts a curtain that conceals one corner of the room.

He finds there a small safe, which he smiles at and before which he stoops.

It is very small, but strong, and promises to keep safe everything deposited beyond its doors.

But the man has come for business; he has not donned the black mask for nothing, and looking back at the fair form on the couch, he goes to work on the safe.

Lura sleeps on, unmindful of the man in the house.

Dreams may come and go, but she does not waken to start from the bed to see the kneeling figure at the safe, nor to hear the click of the inside works as they yield to the cunning of the intruder.

Half an hour later the curtains part, and the man who has been behind them comes forth again and looks once more at the beauty of the plot.

This time the eyes beneath the mask send forth a gleam of unmistakable triumph.

He advances toward the couch and actually bends over Lura.

The light burning near shows him the wrists which lie on the worked counterpane, and he sees the rich bracelets with the serpent-headed clasps.

But he does not touch them.

"Thanks," he says, "I am under obligations to you, Lura, I will see you later on if nothing happens. You have been very considerate to-night and I am really obliged to you."

With this he glides away. He passes from the room but stops in the hall and looks toward the parlor, the room which he first invaded.

"There's nothing there for me," he smiles. "I don't want the Modoc tomahawk nor the Moorish dagger. I have found enough."

He quits the house and strikes the almost deserted street. He passes through the shadows that prevail and doffs the mask ere he quits them.

The hours drag on toward day and the avenue gradually returns to life.

Lura the beautiful rises and looks at the clock on the mantel.

She seems lovelier than ever and in her eyes is the gleam of unmistakable victory.

"This is the day of triumph!" she says. "This is the morning of my success. The rat is still in the trap and all is well. I wonder how he passed the night. I wonder what he thinks where he is. He should have suspected; he should have had his wits about him, but the sharpest lose theirs when they are not on guard. When will Captain Tunis come? He said he would be here soon. He promised to be the first to greet me to-day. Well, it is early yet," and she threw herself into an arm-chair and languidly reposed there while the maid she had summoned by the silver bell dressed her hair.

When left to herself Lura went back to the bedroom and parted the curtains that hid the safe from the other furniture.

In another minute she had opened it.

"I will see if everything here is safe," she said aloud. "I will see that what I placed here is here still and that all is right in this house."

She unlocked a drawer set in the safe and then fell back with a sharp cry.

For a moment she clutched at the nearest chair to steady herself while her eyes seemed ready to fly from her head.

"What, gone?" she gasped. "Have I been robbed? No, this is a horrid dream. I am not awake. I am in a trance and this is a vision of the night!"

No, Lura, it is not. You are wide awake and the little drawer which you have opened is really empty.

When she had caught her breath she ventured to bend forward and look again.

This time she had assumed some courage and held herself steadily while she gazed.

"Yes, it is empty! They are gone! They were here yesterday. I have been plundered!"

After awhile she stood erect but continued to stare at the safe whose open door seemed to tell her that she had been doubly robbed.

She staggered across the room and stood in the main bedchamber where she opened drawer after drawer to find everything in its place there.

"The robber touched nothing but the real treasure-house," she said, her voice still in gasps. "He knew what was valuable. In God's name, who was he?"

She went back and looked through the little safe. She looked everywhere in it, but found nothing to reward her or calm her fears.

Returning to the parlor, Lura dropped into her chair and looked at the fire in the grate.

"He does not come. He stays away with intent. I will find him for until I know something about this robbery, I will not—can not—become Lot Haskins's wife!"

When the maid came in to tell Lura that breakfast awaited her, she found the room deserted. She stared at the empty chair and then ran out like a person in fright.

Lura already was on the street with her face so concealed that the early pedestrians could not see it nor trace by a look the deep-seated fear that tugged at her heart.

It did not take her long to reach a certain part of the city where she sprung from the cab she had hailed.

Entering a certain house, she surprised the half-wakened Simon Sulks, and not asking where Captain Tunis was, bounded up-stairs and burst unannounced into a room where she found that wily man-cat seated and smoking most placidly his after-breakfast cigar.

Captain Tunis had a shock when he looked up and saw standing before him and out of breath the beauty of the avenue.

The cigar dropped and his lap was sprinkled with ashes.

"By Jove! you're an early caller!" he exclaimed, pushing an easy rolling chair toward her. "You come almost before one is up. What has happened?"

Lura did not take the proffered chair, but came toward him with hasty strides and stopped at his side.

"A great deal has happened. I had a visitor last night, or rather early this morning."

"What, a caller at this time?"

"You don't comprehend. I have been robbed!"

The handsome face of Captain Tunis grew a shade paler.

"You have been robbed?" he said. "I don't know why any person would plunder a woman on the day of her wedding."

Lura did not smile. She only shut her hands and looked down into the upturned face of Captain Tunis.

"The thief took something I wished to keep—"

"Something—the last thing, of course—which you did not want out of your hands?"

"Yes, yes!"

The man before her seemed to understand.

"Do you mean to say that the safe was broken into?"

"It was opened."

Captain Tunis looked disturbed.

"I told you"—he began, but went no further. "Don't go back to that. The safe has been robbed, and I am in the net of some low burglar."

"Oh, well, that won't make much difference, for he will not dare to make use of what he took."

"You don't know these men."

"He'll want a ransom, no questions asked, and all that."

But, Lura, not reassured, stood in the middle of the room, and looked at Captain Tunis, not the least excited, and quietly puffing away at his cigar.

"This little affair will not interfere with the ceremony to-day," he said. "It won't interfere with your triumph. It—"

"It will interfere!" broke in Lura, with flashing eyes. "I won't go the altar till I have recovered what was taken from me last night."

Captain Tunis looked at her with amazement in his eyes.

"You don't mean that?" he demanded.

"I do! I swear to you that I will become no man's bride while the jewels are missing. I shall postpone the ceremony. I will tell Lot Haskins that until I have recovered the property I will not become his wife."

Captain Tunis shut his lips, and Lura's keen ears heard teeth grate beneath the black mustache.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GLOVED HANDS OF CAPTAIN TUNIS.

THOUGH the eventful day has arrived, we go back to the night just passed.

It is not very late, and a young girl, whose face bears traces of beauty, stands at a window looking covertly down upon the street that stretches far from the house, and ends near the river, whose dark waters sing the requiem of the nightly unfortunates who seek them to drown their sorrow, and hide their crimes.

The girl is Olive Haskins, the millionaire's child.

The hour is nine, and she has been at the window some time, looking out as if she expects some one who is late.

"To-morrow the crime is to be consummated," she says. "To-morrow they will draw the net around him, and entangle him beyond escape in the wool they have spun. I wish I could rescue him. I wish I knew how to break the spell of witchery and crime that has enmeshed him. I wish I could come between him—my father—and the hands of these dastards who are plotting for the wealth he has amassed. Why don't Jack come?"

A footstep near the house, and she bends forward until her white, anxious face touches the glass.

"It is Jack! He is here at last!"

She turns to the door, and watches it like a hawk.

When it opens, revealing the figure of Jack Parsons, she starts forward and clutches his arm.

"Where have you been so long and what news have you?"

The young man gently disengages her hand and draws back, looking at her with a look of pity and almost hopelessness.

"I've been at work," he said. "I have not been idle and I thank Heaven, Olive, that I have been able to do one of our friends a favor."

"One of our friends?"

"Yes, I found the ferret in the trap and let him out."

The girl did not seem to understand him.

"I mean that I rescued Gilt-Edge Damon, the detective, and that again he is free to look after the mystery of Madeline Miggs."

"Oh, I see now," said Olive with a faint smile. "I understand it all. He was caged then, was he?"

"He was in a trap set by Captain Tunis and it caught him nicely, as he confesses. But he is free again."

"That is good. I am glad of that, for something tells me that we must depend on the cunning and courage of this man of trials. But what do you know about the other matter?"

"About the ceremony?"

"Yes, yes," answered Olive in a whisper.

"Not much. Your father seems as deep in the toils as ever. He laughed at me when I told him that I intended to find Gilbert Haskins, your uncle and his brother."

"But why, Jack? What makes you so eager to find this man?"

Eagerness was depicted all over the white face of the nabob's daughter.

"I verily believe that man knows who killed Madeline Miggs," he said.

"But that is the detective's work."

"I know that, but Gilbert Haskins knows more. He is able to break this cord of crime and cunning. He can do us much good. He was said to have been burned to death in a prison where he was confined when the convicts revolted. Your father believes him dead, but I think—I almost know that he lives. It is a long, strange story which I have picked up link by link. It begins in Louisiana. It ends in New York."

"My Uncle, Gilbert, went to prison, did he?"

"Yes. He was accused of stealing your mother's wedding jewels. He was deliberately sworn into durance, as is certain now, and he swore in open court to get even with those who did the deed."

"Do you think he carried out that threat?"

Jack Parsons was nonplussed. He looked away, but turning again, encountered the keen deep eyes of his betrothed.

"I—I can't say," he answered. "I don't know what to say about this part of it. Your mother, under your father's thumb, was the principal witness on that celebrated trial."

"Merciful heavens! I understand you. My mother was killed in this city—killed at Epsom Tibbets's office as Madeline Miggs—and Gilbert Haskins swore that he would pay her back some day for the evidence she gave in on his trial!"

Young Parsons did not speak for a moment.

"I see it all. You believe that he killed her—that the blow which took my mother's life was dealt by my uncle."

"I don't know what to say," said Jack. "It is a strange, deep case which the great detective is trying to sift to the bottom, and let us hope that he will do so."

"No matter who is condemned," cried Olive. "I say that with a desire to see my mother avenged. No matter who is condemned."

"I think I have located Gilbert Haskins," the young man went on. "I almost believe I have

found this man, and by the merest accident. But he is not the man he was when they sent him up."

"Have you told Gilt-Edge Damon?"

"Not yet, but it shall be done to-night."

"You must make no mistake, for one might be fatal, and not for the world would I have the innocent accused."

Parsons took a turn around the room, and stopped at the window to take a look down into the street.

All at once Olive saw him start.

"You have been followed!" she cried, springing to his side. "You see some one down there whose appearance troubles you."

He turned to her with a smile, and saw her face pressed against the pane.

"You have been looking for me at the window, haven't you?" he asked.

"I have. I couldn't help it. I see him now. It is the man across the street, near the lamp."

Jack said nothing.

"You must keep nothing from me, Jack," continued Olive. "Remember, we are one in friendship and love, though not in name. That man over yonder is watching the house. I know him. It is the man who has come between me and happiness. I have been sold to him. My very soul has been handed over to that cunning, dark-faced wretch, because he has my father in the trap, and because he and the woman who is soon to contaminate our house, have played their game almost through. It is Captain Tunis!"

Jack Parsons's face grew white, and his lips twitched with resolution.

"You have named the tracker," he said, glancing across the street again where the man stood, in a careless manner. "You have called the man outside by his right name. Yes, yonder stands the evil genius of three lives, and I could go over and deliberately throttle him."

"No, he would throttle you," cried Olive. "You have never touched those long, silken hands of his. You have never felt the skin of the city anaconda; you have never felt his fingers twine about your hand while he wished they were at your throat. I have. That man is the impersonation of danger. He is a tiger in lurking; a scorpion that lies in your path, waiting to be stepped on."

The young man watched Captain Tunis, with Olive's hand resting in his, and when he moved it was toward the door.

"You can't afford to rouse him now," she said, seeming to divine his intention as shown by his look.

"I can't eh? I have longed for a chance to meet and tell this rascal what I think of him."

"But he is deadly. Captain Tunis is more than he seems. He is the man with the deadly hand."

Jack with an effort broke from Olive's grasp, but with a sudden spring the young girl threw herself between him and the door.

"You shall not! For my sake, Jack, let him go on his way. The detective will unearth the murderer of my mother. Captain Damon, in whom I have every confidence, will bring the dark to light—"

"You forget they've had him in one trap? Why not in another?"

"His experience will keep him on the lookout," said the girl. "He will be very careful. Ah, Captain Tunis is gone now. Thank Heaven for that!"

"But he has run you down!" cried Jack Parsons. "Do you thank Heaven for that, too?"

Olive was silent.

"But this Gilbert Haskins?" she said. "Do you think he carried out his threat?"

"I must confess that it looks that way," was the reply.

"What does Captain Damon think?"

"The ferret shares his secrets with no one. Of course he would not tell me what he thinks even though I saved him from the trap."

Ten minutes later Jack Parsons stood on the street. He did not think it worth while to look for Captain Tunis and did not bother himself in that direction.

But suddenly, and when he was not looking for his man, he saw the door of a brilliantly lighted bar-room open and who should come out but the handsome captain?

There was almost a collision, and Jack hastily drew aside to let him pass.

Captain Tunis caught sight of the late inmate of the nabob's mansion and Jack saw his dark eyes flash up and his face radiate with a sudden flush.

They were scarcely ten feet apart and the next moment with a bound the young man leaped forward and caught the captain by the shoulders.

"You miserable plotter—you wretch with as many names as crimes. I would like to wring your neck!" cried Jack.

At the same time he threw Captain Tunis across the sidewalk, narrowly missing several people, but not breaking the grip he had obtained.

It took the man with the dark face but a moment to comprehend the situation. He threw up his hands and they came down upon Jack's face with the power of trip-hammers.

Jack felt a stinging sensation, as if the gloved bands were charged with electricity; his hold was broken, and he fell against the building toward which he had thrown the captain.

But sudden as the release was, it did not discomfit the young man, for, recovering in an instant, he rushed forward again and found the man he hated firmly braced and awaiting the attack with something devilish in his gleaming eyes.

But Jack rushed on.

Throwing out his clinched hand, he struck at the handsome face before him, but the blow was warded off with ease, and he was thrown back again, while a strange laugh rung from the captain's lips.

"I'll have him yet!" said Jack, under his breath. "I won't let this villain get off without my autograph over his eyes!"

Once more with renewed fury he launched himself at Captain Tunis, to be caught midway and seized by the gloved hands that were as soft as silk and as dangerous as tiger claws.

"I don't want to hurt him," said Captain Tunis to the little crowd that had gathered. "I don't want to create a scene here, but if he comes at me again, I'll break his neck!"

Jack, who had been thrown back for the second time, heard these words, and saw the real look that accompanied them.

He feared while he hated this man. He had watched him in his many visits to Lot Haskins's house, and had seen that he had great strength and wonderful power and agility in his hands.

But his blood was up.

Again he went toward Captain Tunis—went at him despite the threat but half-concealed in the last words he had uttered; but all at once a man sprung before him, and a hand shoved him back and almost to the edge of the curbing.

"You might kill him, and I won't have it!" cried this person, looking at Jack. "I won't have this man killed except by the sheriff. Keep off!"

The crowd laughed, but Captain Tunis did not.

He had stepped back, and was looking at the man who had interfered.

Jack Parsons was doing the same, but perhaps with different feelings.

"Come with me," said the interferer, taking the young man's arm. "You have no right to kill that man, as I see you would like to do by your eyes. He is nearly at the end of the string."

"Who are you?"

"I am Boston Bilkins."

"No, you are not. You are Gilbert Haskins." There was no answer, but the one eye glinted, and looking over its owner's shoulder, it saw the tall figure of Captain Tunis moving off under the brilliant lights of Gotham.

CHAPTER XXIX.

VENGEANCE ON THE TRAIL.

CAPTAIN TUNIS said nothing of his encounter with Jack Parsons to Lura when she startled him the next morning with the story that she had been robbed by some one.

For some reason he kept the secret to himself, and while he listened to her story he smiled to himself and wondered if he could not spot the hand that had plundered the safe.

"So," said he, continuing to look up into the woman's face. "So you will not marry until you have recovered what you have lost?"

"I will not."

"Do you know that days may intervene between this day and the recovery?"

"I know that."

"Don't you know that you may be held to your bargain by Lot Haskins?"

"I don't know about that," and a smile for a moment illuminated the speaker's face. "He has been to see me. He even wanted to be relieved from the promise, but I would not. Now, do you think he will try to force me to keep my part of the compact?"

"You don't know Lot Haskins," said Captain Tunis. "He is a strange man. He is apt to make you carry out the compact at the hour set for the ceremony."

"But I will not without some clew to the lost property. I dare not."

Captain Tunis said nothing.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, after a pause.

"I am going on with the drama as if nothing was stolen last night," he said.

"You are?"

"Yes."

Their eyes met in flashes which showed that when they crossed swords it was diamond cut diamond.

"Look here, woman," continued Captain Tunis, with just the semblance of a cruel smile at the corners of his mouth. "You forget that I have something at stake in this game. You must not think that you are the only player. That will never do. I have something in it as well as yourself. You must consult the wishes of others."

She gave him a look that seemed to penetrate, but he did not wince.

"You will carry out your part of the compact at the hour named."

Lura's hands clinched, and her eyes became riveted upon him, noticing how cold cut were the lines of his resolute mouth and how deep his cool cleverness.

"I mean that you will marry Lot Haskins within the next twenty-four hours," he went on. "I will give you a little time. But within the space I have allotted you will become his bride, whether the jewels are recovered or not."

She seemed to catch at something as she went back.

"Let there be no misunderstanding. I will have none! You will set the hour—put it as far off as you please, but within the time I have mentioned."

"Then I make it at midnight to-night."

The lips did not seem to move, yet they had set at liberty this one brief sentence.

"At midnight? Very well," said Captain Tunis. "It shall be the hour. I will see that Haskins accepts of the change. I will see that there is no further postponement."

With exasperating coolness he hit the end off another cigar, and crossed his legs upon an ottoman.

Lura looked at him a moment and then slowly turned and walked toward the door.

He did not look after her, her feet seeming to tell him that she was going away, and when she had bowed herself stiffly out, he sprung across the room and touched a bell-cord.

Simon Sults made his appearance.

"Follow that woman, Simon," said Captain Tunis. "Don't let her get out of your sight. When you think you need follow her no longer, come back to me."

Simon Sults seemed to hesitate, but he knew better than to disobey the man who spoke.

In another moment Captain Tunis had returned to his chair, and the wily Simon was on the trail.

"Robbed, was she?" said the captain. "Robbed of something she had in the little safe? I don't wonder that she is frightened over what has occurred, but I knew how to bring her to time, and she will not get out of my clutches till I am ready to let her go."

The morning grew apace and the night vanished.

The lights of the great city went out, and the streets again received their patrons.

Captain Tunis, now and then watching the clock on the mantel before him, wondered perhaps what luck Simon was having, and if he had succeeded in obtaining any news for him.

By and by the private secretary came back.

"Well?" said Captain Tunis, looking at him as he came in and doffed his hat.

"I tracked her down," was the reply.

"Did she go home?"

"No."

"Whither, then?"

"She went to a little house in Cherry street."

"What number?"

Simon remembered it after a moment's reflection, and gave it.

"She stopped there, did she?"

"Yes."

"And you waited for her to come out?"

"I did."

"But had your trouble for your pains?"

"Exactly."

Captain Tunis twisted his mustache and looked into the grate in front of him.

"Did she seem to take a roundabout route as if to throw you off the trail, or did she go straight to the little house?" he asked at last.

"She played it pretty sharp," smiled Simon. "She nearly ran my legs off."

"Just so. That's all. Much obliged, Simon."

Simon Sults went over to the desk at which he generally wrote and sat down like one completely exhausted.

By and by Captain Tunis arose and buttoned his coat to the chin.

He was watched by Simon who said nothing, but smiled when he saw his master quit the house.

"I guess I'll go, too, but not just yet," said the private secretary. "I'm getting tired of this and there's something too dark for my good in this drama. I don't like the looks of things. That woman has eyes one can't resist and they've already made a traitor out of me. I know what it means to cross Captain Tunis and I can't stay here and run the risk of being found out by him."

And while Captain Tunis was walking from the house Simon was packing his earthly possessions preparatory to getting away.

Yes, he had tracked Lura to Cherry street, but he had played Captain Tunis false; he had sold out the man he had served and that to a man who had caught him on the street and taken him to a small *cave* to seat him in a stall there and looking into his eyes ask him a question that made his flesh creep.

"If I don't get away I will be dragged down with the rest of them," he said to himself when he found himself on the street. "I never expected to be caught by that keen-eyed detective and questioned as he questioned me. Was he on the watch? Was he looking for such game as I am? Great Caesar! what eyes he has,

and what a hand when it closes on one! I am out of this game. Good-by, Captain Tunis."

Simon had been overtaken by Gilt-Edge Damon when he was turning back from tracking Lura to the little house on Cherry street, and the ferret had pumped him dry in less than five minutes.

"You know the woman you have been shadowing?" said the detective.

Simon shut his lips like an oyster shuts its shell.

"Come, my man. You remain silent at your peril. That little episode in the Philadelphia counting—"

"For God's sake, don't mention that!" broke in Simon white as a sheet in a flash. "What do you want to know?"

"You knew her?"

"Yes. She is Captain Tunis's friend."

"Lura, eh?"

Simon nodded.

"For whom were you tracking her?"

"You don't want me to turn traitor do you?"

"I want the truth. I don't care what it makes of you."

"I was tracking her for Captain Tunis."

"She was an early caller, eh? You have ears that are always on the alert. You never lose an opportunity to pick up something. You overheard what took place in Captain Tunis's house awhile ago?"

"I—I—"

"Don't stammer, but come out with the truth. The laws of Pennsylvania are far-reaching and a cell awaits the man who comes back to justice."

Simon lost color again.

"Well, Lura came to tell Captain Tunis that she was robbed last night."

"Is that all?" smiled the detective.

"She said she was plundered of something valuable."

"What was it?"

"She did not say."

"But Captain Tunis seemed to understand, didn't he?"

"He did."

"Well, what else? Will the robbery interfere with the wedding?"

"It has postponed it."

"Until when, Simon?"

"Until midnight, to-night."

Gilt-Edge Damon was seen to smile.

"And meantime Captain Tunis will look for the person who plundered Lura."

"I don't know."

"Was he in for postponing the ceremony?"

"No. He wanted to force it to come off at the hour agreed upon; but he gave Lura a choice."

"And she took the hour you have named?"

"She did."

For a moment the face of the detective was a study and suddenly it brightened so that Simon noticed the change.

"Simon, do you remember the night of the 27th—the one on which one Madeline Meggs was killed in Epsom Tibbets's office?"

The little man recoiled in his chair and stared at the man who was quizzing him.

"I have a faint recollection of it," he said slowly.

"Only a faint one, Simon?" smiled Gilt-Edge Damon.

"Yes."

"At what hour did your master come home that night?" asked the detective.

"I don't know. I—I was asleep when he came in."

"With your eyes open like a fox, eh? Simon, I guess I will have to take you over to the Quaker City for a change of air."

The private secretary gasped.

"Come, then, and tell me the truth. You were out that night. You were on the street. You were near Tibbets's office. You stopped Tibbets on his return to his den and asked him the way to G— street. Do you recollect that Simon?"

There was no reply.

The little man with a whiter face than he will have when he is dead sat bolt upright in the chair and stared at the cool-head who was talking.

"You did that. You were serving your master then. You stopped old Tibbets on the street and engaged him in conversation nearly two minutes. You—"

"Don't!" cry Simon throwing up his hands. "For God's sake, don't ask me any more questions. I can't stand it. I shall faint. I never could stand it to be put on the rack. I wasn't serving Captain Tunis then; indeed I wasn't."

"Who were you serving when you stopped old Tibbets?"

"I dare not tell you. I would be killed if I did."

Gilt-Edge Damon leaned back in his chair and looked at the young man with a curious smile.

CHAPTER XXX.
THE DEAD SECRET.

LOT HASKINS was alone in his luxurious library.

The morning was not far advanced, but the

warm sunlight was streaming into the room after one of the most sleepless nights he had ever passed.

It was the morning of his wedding-day.

It was near the time when he was expected to carry out his part of the compact which had been forced upon him by the cool playing of Captain Tunis and Lura the Leopard Queen.

He had not forgotten his interview with Gilbert Haskins, nor could be drive from his mind the strange-looking one-eyed brother who had come back from the dead with the odor of the prison upon him and the mark of the famous revolt on his body.

Gilbert Haskins. He had sworn that brother to prison and now he had seen him again after long years.

Did he believe that the prison-bird had carried out his threat and taken the life of Madeline Meggs, his wife?

Was he thinking of this at that time and were his thoughts cheerful ones on this his wedding-morn?

The bell rung. Its silvery tinkle reverberated throughout the house and in a moment he had a caller.

Lot Haskins looked up expecting to see the tall figure of Captain Tunis—to look into the deadly black eyes of the serpent from the tropics, but instead the maid stood before him holding a letter in her hand."

The millionaire took the letter and dismissed the girl.

Seizing a paper-knife, he opened the letter and started at sight of the first line.

"Put off until midnight, eh?" he cried, with a feeling of relief. "It is postponed. And by her!"

He looked up and took in a full breath of fresh air.

Lura had written him postponing the ceremony and fixing the hour of midnight that night and the place her house on K— street.

He read the letter over three times, or until every word was imbedded in his brain as it were.

"I wonder what brought about this change?" he asked himself aloud. "Did that brother of mine keep his threat? Has he come between as he said he would? Is this the work of Gilbert, the convict?"

The nabob crossed the room and tossed the letter into the grate.

He looked toward the door with the buoyant feelings of one who has escaped a peril, but at the same time he felt that the danger had not been obliterated, only put off.

Meantime there was approaching the house a man whose one eye seemed to glitter as he came on.

He mounted the steps and rung the bell, at which Lot Haskins started and waited for the step of the servant in the hall.

"A little man at the door—a man with but one eye," said the girl, who looked into the library.

"Admit him," and Lot Haskins settled back in his chair and watched the portal.

Boston Bilkins came in with the single eye on the alert, and when he saw that his millionaire brother was alone he came forward and took a chair without an invitation.

"Look at these papers, please," said the jail-bird, throwing upon the table several documents which the nabob eyed with suspicion and eagerness.

The hand of Lot Haskins undid them and he read—first, the confession extorted from Epsom Tibbets, and then the one signed by Mrs. Tibbets.

"You have seen these people?" said Haskins, looking up and meeting the one eye.

"Yes. They signed in my presence."

Lot Haskins seemed to groan.

"The woman signed willingly, the man not quite so willingly; but I got what I went after."

"Now, do you want a similar paper from me?"

The jail-bird drew back and gazed at the millionaire with a smile on his face.

"No. I will let you make amends in another manner."

"What do you mean?"

"Time will tell. I thought you might like to see these papers and I came in here to show them. You won't be married at the hour agreed on."

How did the convict know this? Who had told him the contents of the letter he had just received from Lura?

"No," said Haskins. "I won't be wedded at that hour."

"Will you marry her at all?"

"Why not? You don't know how far this thing has gone."

"Heavens! it rests on the borders of perdition, and I think that is far enough."

"What are you going to try to do?"

"Rescue you."

Haskins could not but look at the man who had risen to his feet, and who stood before him looking more like Gilbert Haskins than ever.

"You mean that you will rescue me in order to carry out the revenge that rankles in your heart?"

"Who has a better right to than I?" cried the

convict. "Don't you know that some people believe that I killed her—that I carried out my old threat?"

"Why shouldn't you? You had her in your power."

"Don't say that. Lot Haskins, when did you recover your knife?"

The eyes of the convict had fallen upon the little knife which Captain Tunis had restored, and with a quick start the millionaire's hand seized it and covered it from the single orb.

"Who told you?"

"Don't ask me too many questions," broke in Boston Bilkins. "I don't want to tell all I know. You have it back. Well, I am glad. It was found—where?—on the street?—or was it picked up where it might have done some damage?"

"This is too much. Every person who comes to this house intimates that I committed that crime. It is infamous! I would not have killed Olive's mother—not for all this world."

"No, you didn't kill her," said the jail-bird, leaning across the table. "No, I know you didn't. She died by another hand than yours."

"You know by whose. That dread secret is yours. Why don't you go to the detectives with it? Why don't you pick out one of the coolest-headed men on the force, and tell him you can solve the mystery of Madeline Miggs?"

"Wait."

"Wait till it is too late—till the murderer puts an ocean between him and eternal justice?"

"I don't say wait that long, Lot Haskins. I say wait until the toils have been wrapped about the guilty—wait until all is ready. Then let the ax fall."

"You may pretend to know more than you really know."

"I know enough. Man, don't you see that I am standing between you and the plot?"

Lot Haskins looked, but did not speak.

"You did not know that Maggie Tibbets was in town, eh?" asked the jail-bird.

"I did not know it."

"You do not know what brought about the postponement of the wedding?"

"I don't know that, either," and Haskins glanced toward the fire into which he had thrown Lura's letter.

"Well, my amiable tigress was robbed," said the convict.

"Robbed?" echoed the nabob.

"Yes, robbed. I put it in plain words, for I don't want to be misunderstood."

What was Lot Haskins thinking about?

"Her house had been invaded while she slept, and when she got up this morning, believing that it was her wedding morn, she discovered that her safe had been plundered and that she was poorer by some property than when she closed her eyes in slumber."

The millionaire listened with eagerness, and watched the convict brother while he proceeded.

"That is what put the wedding off. That is why she has concluded to wait till midnight ere she closes in on the fly in the web. She wanted to postpone it indefinitely, but Captain Tunis said no."

"Captain Tunis?"

"The tiger in kids—your friend and well-wisher," said the convict, in sarcastic tones.

"Do you want to know all about it? Why it was put off, and what Captain Tunis said to her?"

"You can go on if you like."

"Well, he declared that she should not postpone the ceremony until after the recovery of the—stolen property. He threatened her. He showed that he is master at every stage of the drama. He is master, and this woman—this beautiful creature you have promised to marry—is but a tool in the hands of Captain Tunis, though she is by no means as harmless as a dove, but is more cunning than a serpent."

It seemed to the one-eyed convict that Lot Haskins was watching him with all the eagerness he was capable of. It seemed, too, that he was settling back deeper and deeper in his chair, and that he was breathing hard, like a man in the toils of some disease.

"Captain Tunis knows who killed Madeline Miggs," said Boston.

The millionaire gave a quick start.

"Lura knows who killed Madeline Miggs," he continued.

There was another start and the eyes of the nabob became set.

"Simon Sulks thinks he knows who killed Madeline Miggs."

"Who is Simon Sulks?" asked Lot Haskins.

"What, haven't you ever seen this little bundle of duplicity and cunning, Simon Sulks?" cried the convict, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I don't know the man."

"Well, he is Captain Tunis's private secretary," answered Boston.

"And you say he thinks he knows who committed the crime?"

"Yes."

"And what do you know?"

The man of money had thrown his body forward and was looking in the face of the deformed.

"That is to be told by and by."

"But you say that Captain Tunis and Lura know who did it?"

"I say so."

"Well, they know nothing against me," and Haskins smiled, but faintly.

"That's nice," said Boston in mocking tones. "If they don't, why do you let them draw you into the net and keep you there? If they know nothing, why do you sell your child—Madeline's daughter—to this tiger from the South?"

"We have to do some unpleasant things in our lifetimes," evasively answered Haskins.

"But you might have fought off this plot. No, you waited until it was fully matured; you let the eyes and the accursed beauty of this woman Lura lure you to your doom. You let the two enmesh you until you were fully in the toils. You dare not refuse them what they demand. You stood in the shadow of the gallows. You were out that night. You were in the building when Madeline Miggs was killed and they know it."

For some time there was no reply to these words and when Lot Haskins spoke again it was with a look straight into the face of the man at his chair.

"Do you know where Olive is?" he asked.

"I do."

"Is she in the city?"

"She is."

"And safe?"

"I can't say that. Captain Tunis has discovered her hiding-place."

Captain Tunis! Always that man!

"You must protect her. You are her uncle. You must not let that man touch her."

"Then you are going to break from the plot? Then you are going to remain from Lura's house to-night?"

The millionaire seemed to shiver.

"No, you dare not. Is that it?" laughed the convict. "You dare not. The fear of what they know—the dread of what they pretend to know—makes a child of you. You asked me awhile ago if I knew who killed Madeline Miggs. I will answer you now. Listen, Lot Haskins. Here is the dark secret."

Gilbert, the convict, stooped over the nabob's chair and whispered one word.

"My God!" cried Haskins, shrinking back with a start.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RAT TIBBETS CAUGHT.

"I MUST get out of the drama. I can't remain in it another moment and be true to myself."

These words fell from Simon Sulks's lips after his forced interview with Gilt-Edge Damon.

He had been serving two masters, or rather one master and one mistress.

And he had betrayed one and almost betrayed the other.

The shadow of the old crime—the one committed long before the opening of our story, and so broadly hinted at by the detective—had fallen again across his path, and he was fearful of the result of his remaining longer "in the game," as he expressed it.

He would follow Epsom Tibbets's example and get out of the shadow as quickly as possible; he would bury himself in some obscure town not very far from New York, but far enough to be out of the regular beat of the man-hunter. He would find something to do there, or do nothing at all, but above all things he would not poke his nose into danger again.

As fate would have it, he boarded the cars as soon as possible, and landing at a small station in New Jersey, was conveyed across the country to a town that looked quiet and humdrum enough for the most cautious.

Simon was anxious to get out of the way of all keen eyes, and far enough from those whom he supposed would be looking for him after awhile.

He reached the town near the noon hour of the day of his adventure with Gilt-Edge Dan.

He put up at the only hotel in the place, and sat down to the excellent meal served in the old-fashioned dining-room on the ground floor.

Simon was discussing the dinner with the eagerness of a half-starved man, when, happening to look up, he encountered a face that caused him to start.

"Great Jericho! it's Epsom Tibbets," he mentally ejaculated, and almost dropped his fork.

"Now, here is a pretty pickle, and I seem to be in it," he went on, wondering if the runaway broker had recognized him. "Here I come for rest and recreation, and the first thing I do is to run across the very man I don't want to see."

It soon became evident that Epsom Tibbets knew him, for on several occasions he had obtained small loans from Tibbets, with his jewelry as security for the same, and he knew that he had been recognized.

Tibbets finished his dinner with as much complacency as he could under the circumstances, and when he was through he came to where Simon sat, bent over the table a second, and said:

"Yes, I am here, and so are you, ha, ha! I don't intend to run off. I came here for a little

rest—didn't want to be bothered by the reporters, you know. Too inquisitive. Want rest anyhow. Been overworked. Nice day. Come and see me."

Simon had no difficulty in finding where the broker lived, and in less than an hour he was seated in his room.

"Are you looking for me?" nervously asked Tibbets.

"By no means. I am looking out for number one—that's all."

"Let the city, eh?"

"That I have."

Tibbets was silent for a moment. There was a question he wanted to ask, and was almost afraid to try himself. He had had sleepless nights since coming to Pigeon Roost; he had dreamed of detectives, prisons and worse; he wanted to know what they were doing with the Miggs case; the papers he read told him nothing. So far as they were concerned, it was either a deep mystery or had been settled and passed out of history.

But he knew better; he knew that no one had been hanged for the murder of Madeline Miggs; he knew that the detectives were still at fault; that Gilbert Haskins was trying to clear up his character, and that, if something important concerning the crime had been discovered, he (Gilbert) would have told him when he came for the confession which he (Tibbets) had signed.

"Well, how are they coming on with the Miggs case?" asked Tibbets at last.

Simon started.

"I—I don't know, but from what I do know, I think some one will be surprised ere long."

"Surprised? How's that?"

"I think the spotter is unraveling the mystery."

"Damon, the Wonder-Sharp?"

"Yes."

Tibbets took a long breath.

"I hope he will. I really hope so, for then I can go back, a free man, and won't be pestered by the reporters."

"I hope so, too, but when he unravels the case, I don't want to be near the powder."

"No? What have you to fear?"

Simon looked toward the door. He had not forgotten the detective's words:

"You are the man, Simon, who stopped Epsom Tibbets on the sidewalk the night of the murder. You are an accomplice!"

These were the words that still rung in his ears. The roar of the train which carried him to Pigeon Roost had not drowned them. He heard them still, and now he sat in the presence of Tibbets himself.

By and by the old broker, somewhat relieved by Simon's replies, walked across the room and drew the curtain aside as far as it would go. This let a flood of strong light into the chamber, which had been shadowed until then, and Simon found himself full in the light.

He shrunk from the gaze of Epsom Tibbets as the sunlight fell upon him.

In another moment he was looked at with all eyes.

"Stand up, please, my friend," said Tibbets.

Simon did not know what to do. It was coming; he felt it was and it was the last thing he wanted to come where he was.

"Why should I stand up?" he asked.

"Just to satisfy me. You don't object, do you?"

"No, but the request seems so queer that—"

Simon rose and stood erect before the broker and was looked at while his heart seemed to stand still beneath his coat.

"I used to patronize you, you know," he said, with an enforced smile as he watched Tibbets. "I brought you my watch on more than one occasion and got something on it."

"Yes. Pull your hat down over your eyes, please."

Simon laughed.

"You'll want me to take off my coat, won't you?" he exclaimed.

"No, I think you had it on that night."

"What night?"

A strange smile overspread Epsom Tibbets's face.

"Why, have you forgotten?" he cried. "The night they killed Madeline Miggs, to be sure. Yes, that settles the matter. You are the man! You are the man, Simon Sulks."

"What man?"

"The man who pretended to want the direction to G—street that night. I met you near my office when I was coming back from dropping the letter. I told you but did not get a look at you then, though the moment you came into this room everything flashed back over my mind and I thought I had you dead to rights. Do you know what some people think? They really think that I killed Madeline Miggs myself—that I killed her for the diamonds she brought to the office; they believe—some people do—that I never went out to drop a letter, as I say I did; but that I remained in the office and deliberately stabbed her to death."

Simon listened to this with a half-smile at the corners of his unusually thin lips.

He had poked his head into danger instead of getting away from it, but who thought of finding Epsom Tibbets in that place?

"You knew where G—street was—knew it all the time, for you have been all over the city in the service of your master."

"My master?"

"Yes, the man called Captain Tunis. You are his private secretary. You are even now in his employ, as I believe you were that night. What did he tell you to do when you had found me?"

"Nothing. I am not looking for you."

"No lies, Simon Sulks. The door is locked and you don't get out of this room until you tell the truth and sign a certain paper which you shall write at my dictation."

"At your dictation?" echoed Simon. "I won't sign anything of the kind."

"You won't, eh? Be careful how you play with fate!" and Epsom Tibbets opening a drawer in the table at which he sat, took out a revolver which he held in his long hands with all the coolness of a duelist.

"What will you do if I don't sign?" asked Simon.

"I'll blow your brains out where you sit and give the coroner a job!"

There was something so cool and merciless in the tones that rung in his ears that he did not answer. He saw that the speaker was in deadly earnest and that he did not tremble as he used to when he counted bills in his little office over in New York.

Simon wished for the thousandth time that he had faced the menacing danger in Gotham and not come to Jersey and straight into the fire.

"You'll find pens and ink on the table. Draw up your chair and write."

There was no alternative. Simon believed Epsom Tibbets was mad—that the events of the last few weeks had rendered him really insane and that if he refused to write and sign he would be a bleeding corpse on the floor.

He had refused to tell Damon, the detective who had employed him the night of the murder, but there seemed no way of escaping this madman.

He looked at Epsom Tibbets only to see that he was determined and that he would carry out his threat if he was not obeyed in every particular.

"I don't want to send you back to the city in a box," continued the fugitive broker. "You wouldn't present a very handsome appearance and your clothes might be crumpled somewhat, especially if the coffin was not a fit. I want to do the fair thing, Simon. Don't tell me that you are not the man who wanted to know the way to G—street. I see through it all now. A man wanting to know where lies a street with which he is already familiar! Preposterous! There is deception on the face of it."

"But, you see—"

"We don't want to discuss the question. I don't anyhow. I won't discuss it. Write!"

Simon, swallowing hard, took up the pen.

He gritted his teeth and glared at the paper as if he were about to sign his own death-warrant.

It might be such, for there was no telling what Epsom Tibbets would do with what he intended to force from him at the muzzle of the revolver.

Thinking for a moment, the fugitive broker began, Simon following him with the pen as rapidly as he could:

"IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY:—

"Know all men, that I, Simon Sulks, in the employ of Captain Tunis, was on the streets of New York on the 27th of February this said year. That I did on the night in question, about the hour of ten, stop one Epsom Tibbets, broker, returning to his office from mailing a letter, and ask him the way to G—street, said street being well known to me at the time. That I was then acting for another party; that I was told to watch for Epsom Tibbets aforesaid; that in stopping him I was acting for others, knowing that something unlawful was going on in the building occupied by Tibbets; that I delayed the broker at least two minutes on the street. All of which was done with the knowledge and by the command of—"

Epsom Tibbets stopped and looked at Simon, who had paused and was bending over the paper with a face totally devoid of color.

"Fill out the blank and sign your name," said Tibbets. "Those two acts will complete the document. You know whose name to put in where I have stopped."

"But—"

"Go on!"

The revolver came up and looked into Simon's face. It seemed to have a muzzle as large as a cannon's. That was enough.

The young man bent over the paper again and made a few strokes with the pen.

Tibbets rose and bent over the table.

"Jehosaphat!" he cried. "Is that true, Simon Sulks?"

"As I live, it is!" was the reply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WOMAN ON THE TRAIL.

It is night again in "the City between the Rivers."

A man who has been watching a certain house for some time, moves away as the front door opens and an overcoated individual comes out.

The two walk off, but not together.

One is at the heels of the other, and is led a long chase half-way across the city, and to a street where everything is quiet, though the hour is not very late.

"It lacks three hours of the time set apart for the wedding, and Captain Tunis is out for some business of a private nature," says the man on the trail. "He is going somewhere—just where I am a little anxious to discover, and I will find out unless he gives me the slip, which he is not likely to do."

Captain Tunis—he of the soft, but deadly hands—walked on until he found himself in the neighborhood of Lura's home.

As he turned down that street, with the gliding figure of Gilt-Edge Damon at his heels, he walked erect and carried himself with the air of a victor.

Three hours before the time!

At midnight, the hour he had set himself, Lura was to become the wife of Lot Haskins, and he would, in time, become the husband of the pure and beautiful Olive.

All this would happen, despite the obstacles in their paths; the man of clews should fail; the prison-bird should fail; in short, every enemy should fail, but the drama should be carried out and the golden prize raked from the board.

Captain Tunis seemed to smile as he neared the house of the Queen of the Leopard.

He went up the broad steps and rung.

The door was opened by a servant, and the tall figure of the cool captain vanished.

Crossing the hall to the parlor where the carpet gave forth no sounds, he dropped into a chair, and took out a cigar case of solid silver.

A cooler wretch never entered Lura's house than he.

He smoked for a while without exhibiting any impatience, but at last, after frequent glances toward the door, and a few toward the red curtains where Lura usually wrote at the ebony desk, he threw down the cigar, and touched a call-bell on the table.

In a moment the maid came.

"Your mistress?" said Captain Tunis.

"She is out."

"Out?"

The black eyes seemed to emit sparks of sudden fire.

"Out at this hour?" he continued.

"She is not in the house. Did she expect you?"

This was impudence on the part of a servant.

"I can't say that she expected me just yet, but—"

Captain Tunis stopped, for at that moment he happened to glance at the little cabinet of curiosities that hung along the wall.

The Modoc tomahawk was there, but the Moorish dagger was not.

"Did she say anything about her return?" he said at last.

"Nothing."

Captain Tunis reflected a little.

The maid vanished, and the man with the dark face drummed on the arms of the chair while he took in the room with his gleaming eyes.

"Gone, eh? Out of the house, and within three hours of her wedding! Whither has she gone? The Moorish dagger is missing, but that may mean nothing or everything."

He rose and stood before the mantel. He looked toward the red curtains, and finally stepped over to them.

Parting their folds, he looked into the little room thus disclosed, and smiled when he saw the ebony desk and its surroundings.

"I won't wait. I think I know where she is. Yes, I think I can track Lura on her wedding night."

He went out, and stood for a moment in the shadow of the house.

The man who had watched him was still on duty; he had watched with tireless patience, and when Captain Tunis moved off he had him again on his track.

Captain Tunis went down the street, and turned at a corner where his figure was revealed by the lamp.

All at once he caught sight of a woman who had just crossed the thoroughfare toward him.

It was Lura!

As she came on, the man with the dark eyes looked and smiled.

"Coming home, eh?" he whispered. "Where have you been?"

"The Queen of the Leopard came on and passed toward the house he had just left."

Captain Tunis turned and followed. He saw her run up the steps and waited a moment before he followed suit.

Lura in the parlor turned like one stung by a scorpion when she heard the sound of the bell and watched the door with the eye of a hawk.

As the figure of Captain Tunis crossed the step she fell back and seemed to frown.

"Well, you have come!" she said, glancing at the clock ticking away the minutes on the mantel. "I have been out."

"So I see."

Lura threw her sacque on the chair and stood in the full bright glare of the light.

"I didn't find him!" she cried, replacing the Moorish dagger in the little cabinet of curiosities.

"Whom have you been hunting?"

"The robber."

"I hope you don't think you know who plundered you?"

"I think I do. I went to his den. I have just come from there. I intended to force the property from him and, having done that I intended to give his associates another mystery as deep as the one that he is tracking down."

Captain Tunis looked at her, but did not speak.

"I am on his track. I know who robbed me."

"Well, were you going to deprive him of his only eye?"

Lura came forward with fire in her jet-black orbs.

"What do you mean? Of his only eye? He has two—two eyes and both are good ones!" she said.

"I thought you meant the man who held Simon up and robbed him—the man who plundered me, too."

"I don't mean that wretch," said Lura. "I leave him to you for he never molested me. I mean the detective who has undertaken to solve the Meggs mystery. He is the person who plundered my safe."

"Impossible! That man has died like a rat in a trap ere this."

"You may think so, but he has not. You have been feasting yourself on the belief that he is out of the way, but he is still on the trail. I have it from the little secret-keeper. I found her to-night, but not him. I discovered Clova in the office, but the ferret was not there. I think I came too late to find him."

Captain Tunis looked like one amazed. He wondered if all this could be.

Gilt-Edge Dan out of durance? The detective in the game out of the trap? Had he not lately looked down upon him in the underground cell and heard his voice?

"What proof, woman, have you that he robbed you?" he asked.

"Who else would plunder me?"

"Ha, ha, is that all?" laughed the captain, but Lura did not speak. "Is this your 'proof positive' that he robbed the safe? And you were hunting him with the Moorish dagger on this 'proof'?" I am amazed. The fox is still in the trap."

"Go and see. You know where he is and there is time enough."

Lura looked at the clock again.

"If he is there I will be satisfied, but if he is not—if he is at large—this man of trails—I must again put off the wedding."

"We'll discuss that when we come together again. I will go and see."

Captain Tunis left the house and once more glided down through the shadows of the pave.

Again—for the third time that night—he had a man at his heels. He had tracking him up one street and down another a man who never let a quarry escape, and when he reached and let himself into a certain building, his tracker stopped and grinded.

Captain Tunis found himself once more under the roof that had sheltered the Gilt-Edge Detective as the rat in the trap.

He went down to the corridor below ground and struck a match.

As the little flame shot upward, he uttered a strange cry and looked at the stones that lay at his feet.

It was true. The detective had escaped!

For a moment Captain Tunis stood and surveyed the scene of ruin.

He gazed at the spectacle with feelings of rage and disgust; he looked upon the little heap of stones with thoughts that burned their way through his brain.

"She was right. He is out and the chances are that he is the robber."

He left the house with welded lips and eyes that told a story of coveted vengeance. Once in the corridor and with a match to aid him, he looked at his watch.

"Nearly two hours yet," he said.

Yes, nearly two hours yet until midnight.

Captain Tunis went back, but not directly to Lura's abode. He turned into a street not very far from there and went up the stairs leading to his own lodgings.

At home again!

He looked about the room, but this time no Simon Sulks greeted him.

Did he know that his man had abandoned a failing cause? Was he aware that that very day he had encountered Epsom Tibbets and that the money shark had extorted from him a terrible confession?

Captain Tunis sat down at a desk, his own, and wrote rapidly for ten minutes. Then he sealed what he had written after reading it over carefully, and thrusting it into his pocket, went out again.

This time he went back to Lura's house.

It lacked but an hour of midnight.

"She has gone out again!" said the maid who let him in.

Captain Tunis swore an oath that fairly blanched the girl's cheeks.

"But she left something for you in case you came back," and the maid extended from the

folds of her garment a letter which Captain Tunis snatched from her hand.

She did not wait to see him break the seal and open the letter.

He went to the table where the jet burned and read as follows:

"I will be back by midnight, if I can. Don't try to hunt me for that might be risky. I will find this robber or never become the wife of Lot Haskins. You know what this means. LURA."

"Yes, I know what it means," cried Captain Tunis, clinching his hand and crushing the letter into a wad. "I understand it fully and so does the man who robbed you, Lura."

He went over the cabinet and smiled when he saw that the Moorish dagger was gone again.

"This woman is mad. No, not mad, but foolish. She can't dagger this ferret as easily as—"

He did not finish the sentence.

"Haskins must know of this. He must know that he need not come to this house at the appointed hour. But I will see that the wedding comes off. By the nine gods! I will see that I am not cheated out of my share of the stakes, and as for Lura, she knows that she must eventually become the wife of the millionaire."

Twenty minutes later Lot Haskins, standing in his library with a pallid face and in full dress, was startled to hear footsteps in the hall, and he turned to see Captain Tunis come in.

"You see I am ready," he said with a cold smile as he encountered the serpent gaze of the dark-faced man.

"But you need not hurry. The ceremony has been postponed."

Lot Haskins seemed to gasp. He dropped one glove upon the table, and stared at the man who had spoken.

"Postponed?" he echoed.

"Postponed."

"Until when?"

"Perhaps until to-morrow. But it will take place. I have pledged myself to this. You need not fear, Haskins. You are not going to lose the beautiful Lura."

No, he did not fear this. His fear was that he would become the husband of this tigress—that by such an alliance he would be forever in the toils of the persons who knew who killed Madeline Miggs, his wife.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FALL OF A MOORISH DAGGER.

LURA the beautiful—Lura the Leopard Queen, though she had no more spotted subjects—was on the trail.

Her belief that she had been robbed by Gilt-Edge Dan, the ferret, was well-grounded, and when she went out the second time that night, with the Moorish dagger concealed beneath her garments, she was filled with but one desire, and it seemed to burn a hole in her heart.

She went back to the place where she had stolen upon little Clova, in the detective's room, and drawn from the child the fact that Damon was not in, that she did not know where he was.

Once more she crept up the stairs and listened at the door.

With tiger tread she had approached the portal, to learn nothing definite. She did not open the door, which she thought might be unlocked, but after a time stole back and went down to the street again.

"Never mind. My mind is made, Captain Tunis or no Captain Tunis," she said, under her breath. "I will find this man-hunter before I become a wife. I will not let him escape me, for I must recover what he took from the little safe. He must not live and have such things in his possession."

Though she knew it not, Lura was tracked from the detective's den by a man whose single eye burned like a solitary spark in his head, and whose tread was as noiseless as her own.

Gilbert Haskins—Boston Bilkins is no more in this romance of a city's secrets—laughed to himself as he tracked Lura up one street and down another.

Having lost her prey the woman of the leopards did not know where to go.

She thought at one time of going back and waiting for Gilt-Edge Dan. He must come back some time; yes, he would return before he made many more moves; he would want to see Clova, or to develop his final plans in the quietude of his den.

She stopped at last in front of a small *cafe* from which came to her the odor of midnight viands.

Lura was hungry. Her long hunt for the ferret had tested her powers and Nature was asserting her rights.

She looked into the place through the windows and at last entered.

Gilbert Haskins did the same, but with his hat over his one eye, and his drooping shoulder so raised that it did not excite curiosity.

The eye saw Lura enter a stall near the end of the long room and the curtain fall behind her.

He was passing after her when a hand touched him and he was offered a seat at one of the tables.

"I am with the lady yonder," he said. "I am her escort."

He kept on until he reached the stall and parted the curtains.

Lura looked up, as, with a start, she recognized the man.

In an instant her hand dropped to her side, and the fingers grasped something there.

"Don't put yourself to any trouble," remarked Gilbert Haskins, taking a seat at the end of the table, and between her and the exit. "I won't put you to much trouble. I only want you to sign a paper."

"You?" cried the woman. "You want me to sign a paper? After robbing a friend of mine?"

"Yes, I did hold Simon Sulks up and plunder him; but I didn't get very much," grinned the ex-convict.

Lura made no reply. She seemed to be measuring the distance between them, and wondering whether her arm could reach him if it held a dagger.

"Here, this is it," continued the jail-bird, pulling a paper from his bosom. "You see I expected to find you some time, and I thought I would write it out. There is nothing lacking but your signature."

Lura's eyes fell to the written words.

"It isn't much, you say?" she said. "I wonder what you call not much. Let me see it!"

The man with the single eye shoved the paper toward her, with the complacency of a cool head in everything.

"Merciful heavens! you don't want me to put my name to this, do you?" she exclaimed.

"Why not? You don't object, do you?"

It was look for look across the table.

"This is—"

"Yes, I know it is."

Lura remained silent.

"But I can't sign it."

"Very well. Let me have it, then. I will see that it is used in another way."

"In what way?"

"I will give the case to the detective."

The woman with the sloe-black eyes shuddered. Her hand gripped anew the concealed dagger, and she glared at the man who had tracked her down.

"You're out late, eh?" remarked Haskins, with a smile. "Are you looking for the person who robbed you?"

How did he know what she was looking for? Who told this man from prison what had sent her to the streets instead of the altar? Was he omniscient?

"Oh!" added Gilbert, leaning back in his chair, "if you won't sign, why, I suppose that ends it. I wrote out this confession with a full knowledge of the facts in the case. I know what I know. I will let you enjoy your lunch."

He pushed back his chair and Lura watched him with the cunning of a hawk.

What, let this man go with that paper on his person? Let him get away, perhaps to find Gilt-Edge Dan before she could?

"Look here," said Lura, at which the convict dropped back into his chair. "Don't you know that you can't afford to be mixed up in a case of this sort?"

"I know what you mean. I have been a prison-bird. I still owe the State some service. You mean that if I were discovered, I would be hurried back to the dungeon. Is that it?"

"You have stated the case precisely. You are a hunted man, though years have fled since the commission of the crime."

"I know. I am Boston Bilkins to the world, but to a few I am Gilbert Haskins."

"The detective knows it not."

"Wrong, madame! Gilt-Edge Dan has heard the truth since sundown. He knows all."

Lura seemed to lose hope.

"You won't sign, then?"

"It would get me into trouble."

"I might want it for my own private satisfaction."

"Men of your stamp are not to be trusted."

"No? That's a fact, perhaps. Men of my stamp! I fancy there are few such. You are looking for the man who took your property. You didn't find him at home, eh?"

The woman started.

Then, this man knew who had robbed her. Then it was Gilt-Edge Dan, after all, and she was right in her suspicion!

"Let me see the paper again, please."

Gilbert Haskins passed it across the table, and for the second time Lura read:

"TO THE WORLD:—

"This paper is the solemn confession of Lura Lorel, and is signed by her in her right mind, and in the presence of no officer of the law. I confess to having testified against one Gilbert Haskins in the year 186—, and in the State of Louisiana. I here confess that my testimony was false in every particular. I knew the woman called Madeline Miggs—the woman who was killed in Epsom Tibbets's office February 27th, 186—. I know who killed her. I went to the office that night. I was armed with a dagger. I found Madeline Miggs alone in the office, while the broker had gone to post a letter. I entered the room, stole up behind the woman and killed her by burying my dagger in her heart, after which crime I took a sachet which she had placed on the table—a sachet containing diamonds given to her by her husband, Lot Haskins, on her wedding day. All this in the sight of God I declare to be true."

Such was the paper the jail-bird wanted Lura to sign!

Such was the import of the most terrible document she had ever had placed before her.

No wonder she refused, and wondered if any one would see or hear if she plunged the Moorish dagger into the heart of the man across the table.

What, sign a paper confessing that she had murdered Madeline Miggs?

Clear up by one stroke of the pen the dread dark mystery of the great city!

That meant the hangman's noose; that meant obloquy and the losing of the golden prize for which she had played and at whose threshold she stood with the wedding garment made.

She took a long breath as she handed the paper back to its owner.

"If I signed, it should not be here," she said. "I would not transact business of such import in this place."

"Where, then?"

"At my home."

The one eye was looking her through, and Lura dared not hope that her implied proposition would be accepted.

At home!

Yes, if she had Gilbert Haskins there there would be no signing at all. If she could get that man across her step there need be no dipping of a pen into ink to record the truth of the blackest crime on the calendar.

"I will go there with you," Gilbert Haskins promptly announced.

Lura could hardly believe that she heard aright! Had he really consented to go home with her? Or was he merely mocking her earnest desire?

She thought she would try him.

"Come, then. I will go home."

She had not touched what had been brought her, but she did not feel hunger now. She was about to entrap this man with the one eye and the dread secret. That was meat and drink to her.

They left the *cafe* together. They walked along the street, Lura with her veil pulled down and Gilbert Haskins watching her like a cat. It might have been seen that he was not looking at her face, but at her half-hidden hands.

It is the hand that kills.

On, on they went, the Leopard Queen now and then looking down at her strange escort, and ever and anon smiling to herself beneath the veil.

"What will I do with him?" she asked herself. "Why, what should I do with a tiger of this description? I will take him to the parlor. I will turn on him like a leopardess—like Cleo would do if she had not been killed—and I will rid myself forever of this man. Yes, that's what I will do with Gilbert Haskins. He has been tracking me and he is likely to turn up after we win the game if I don't silence him forever now!"

Home seemed a long ways off that night. It seemed across the river, yet it was not very far from the *cafe* and when Lura came in sight of it and realized that Gilbert Haskins was still at her side she blessed the good fortune that had thrown them together.

Lura opened the door and went in, half-fearful that the man would back out at the supreme moment; but there was nothing of this about the jail-bird.

She led the way to the parlor.

How still the house was! Not a sound was heard to break the oppressive silence that reigned beneath her roof.

She felt again the handle of the Moorish dagger and wound her fingers about the ivory hilt.

In another moment she would have this cool head at her mercy, if mercy her rage possessed. In less than a minute the document would be in her hands, still unsigned, with the secret of its existence all hers and hers alone.

She opened the door leading to her parlor and Gilbert Haskins stepped in.

"Take your chair, please," she requested.

He would have to turn to do so. Lura had calculated this.

As he turned, though quickly, she sprung at him with the fury of a tigress; but her wrist was caught in mid-air and she looked into the face of Gilt-Edge Dan, the terrible detective!

There was a start, a sudden cry which something stifled, and the Moorish dagger quivered in the floor at the feet of the convict.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WONDER-SHARP WINS.

GILBERT HASKINS recoiled and gazed first at the white-faced woman, then at the ferret who gripped the wrist on which was the serpent-headed bracelet, with a grip of steel.

"Will you sign now?" the jail-bird asked, bending toward the beautiful demon. "Will you confess to the truth I wrote out for your signature?"

There was no reply.

Gilt-Edge Dan led her to her arm-chair and saw her slide into its velvet depths. Her face was upturned to him: her eyes, as deep and liquid as ever, seemed to light up with suddenly aroused passion and her hands were still.

The detective drew from his pocket something which he unwrapped and held out in his hand.

It was a mate to the dagger that quivered in the floor—an exact counterpart of the Moorish blade!

"This is not all," said he, noticing how Lura was watching him. "I have the other proof!"

Once more his hand vanished in his bosom and this time it was followed by a sparkle, when it reappeared.

Diamonds!

"You are the robber! I thought so," said Lura without so much as the faintest smile.

"Yes, I am the burglar and I did not look in the wrong place. You kept both together—the prize and the dagger. You should have destroyed all."

There was no reply to this, but the hands of the woman seemed to clinch and she looked slowly toward Gilbert Haskins.

"You are the person who killed Madeline Miggs," continued Gilt-Edge Dan. "Why? Because she came back to life—because she crossed your path while you were plotting with your tiger mate for the millions of Lot Haskins. With that woman in this city, the plot was doomed, for Haskins had discovered that she was here and you killed her in time to prevent a reconciliation. You had an accomplice that night?"

"And I suppose the traitor has betrayed me!" broke in Lura. "I suppose Simon Sulks has turned traitor and that he has told the whole story to you."

She glared at the detective and seemed to wait for his reply.

"Simon told because he didn't want to go back to Philadelphia and do penance for another crime. He walked the street and kept Epsom Tibbets back two minutes. He has served two masters, but of late he has deserted Captain Tunis."

"And you have caught the captain?"

There was eagerness in the woman's tones.

"We will have the captain also."

"You will? That is good! But for him I would not be in the meshes to-night. But for that cool, calculating devil I would not be where I am. But I am in it. I will not repine. That man yonder—Gilbert Haskins—has played a double game and I don't blame him. One half of the city would soon believe that he killed Madeline Miggs, and but for certain things, you would belong to that half, Captain Damon."

The Gilt-Edge Detective only smiled.

"Do you know where he is?" asked Lura.

"We know."

"And Lot Haskins? I suppose he is congratulating himself over his escape?"

"He knows nothing of this, yet."

"No? I wish I could tell him. I wish I could be the first to convey to him the intelligence of his escape."

"You may."

Lura sprung up with flashing eyes and looked at the two men.

"You don't mean that?" she iterated.

"Every word of it."

"Then, take me to him!"

"Gilbert, call a hack. I will remain with this woman."

"Yes, call a hack and take me to Lot Haskins. Let me be the first one to tell him who killed Madeline Miggs!"

"But he knows that," the convict asserted.

"Who told him?"

"I told him!"

"You? And pray who told you?" and Lura went toward the one-eyed with her hands tight shut.

"I more than guessed it," was the reply.

"But, you never could have proved it. The victory belongs to Damon, yonder—Damon, the merciless, and cunning bloodhound of Gotham. Don't you know what might have taken place? Do you know that Lot Haskins, himself, could have been hanged for that crime?"

"By the witness of the knife!"

A smile passed over Lura's face.

"He lost it in the corridor the night of the crime. What was he doing there? Doesn't he refuse to tell? Don't you know what a jury would think of this?"

"But the cab, Gilbert!" interrupted the ferret-sharp.

That night, with the city buried in slumber, a closed carriage stopped in front of the millionaire's mansion, and three persons alighted.

One, a woman, veiled, walked toward the house, and for the first time in her life Lura Lorel crossed the threshold which she had hoped to cross under other, and less startling conditions.

She was accompanied by two men, and when, after some waiting, the heavy doors of Lot Haskins's home opened, all three entered the mansion.

"Heavens!" cried the nabob, falling back from the trio; and leading the way to the library, he let on the gas with nervous hand and turned upon his guests.

Lura removed her veil and stood erect before him.

"I thought the ceremony was indefinitely

postponed," ejaculated the millionaire, in undisguised astonishment.

"It is. It is postponed forever," was the answer. "It will never take place. Ask that man why!"

The gloved hand of Lura covered the detective, and her look was a flash which would have killed had it been a bullet.

Lot Haskins turned upon Gilt-Edge Dan.

"It is postponed forever because this woman is in the hands of eternal justice. She is the mystery of the night of the 27th!"

For a moment Haskins did not seem to understand, and then, with a look at the convict brother, he fell back into a chair.

"What did I whisper to you the last time I was here?" asked Gilbert.

"My God! You told me so, but, it was so horrible, so dark, so dreadful, I thought it impossible!"

"Ask her!" insisted the man from prison. "She holds back nothing now."

The figure of Lura seemed to increase in stature; her eyes got a light they had not had before.

"I played and lost. It was the only way I could have won, but the cunning of that man came between—his cunning and your convict brother's persistence."

Lot Haskins's head fell back again. For a moment he shut his eyes.

"Take that woman away!" he suddenly cried. "Take her away and hang her until she is dead—dead—dead! Oh Madeline—Madeline!"

Lura only looked at him and smiled.

"Give up your secret, will you?" she said. "What took you to that hallway that night?"

Haskins felt the color leave his face. He tried to speak, but his tongue failed him.

"But, suddenly, with a mighty effort, he pulled himself together and struck the table with his hand.

"It was not murder!" he cried. "I went thither for another purpose. I went to borrow some money from the old shark—I, Lot Haskins, the millionaire so called. I am not the nabob they call me. I have speculated; I have gone almost to the foot of the ladder. I went to borrow of the meanest money shark in New York. It was worth my honor to be caught in his den. No! I did not go there to—kill Madeline Miggs."

A proud smile curled the lips of the woman who listened.

"You at the foot of the ladder?" she said. "Great God! did we play for an empty treasure-chest? Here, take me away!"

In the shadows of a house, watching the gliding figure of a man as it crept in and out of the demi-gloom of one of the thousand streets of Gotham, crouched a person with a pair of keen eyes in his head.

When the figure thus seen had vanished, the watcher crept out into the light and hurried away.

"Halt!"

"I thought so. There are two of them," he said, under his breath.

He turned and came toward a man standing within twenty feet of him, not the one he had watched with such persistence, but a smaller figure, that went at him with the agility of a cat.

A pair of hands went out as the leaping person left the ground, a pair of hands caught the figure as it touched him, and then he held at arms' length for a moment the agile form of Gilbert Haskins.

"I'll break your neck now and rob the world of one of its jail-birds."

"Not yet!"

Another man came forward with the swiftness of an arrow, landed against the speaker and bore him to the nearest building with a crash.

Jack Parsons—Olive's betrothed—held Captain Tunis there, despite his attempts to carry out his threat against the one-eyed jail-bird!

The game was up, and the dark-eyed man knew it. He knew that the drama lacked but one act, and that one the one always supplied by the sheriff.

In the toils he had thrown around others! In the trap he had set for his enemies; in a cell in the Tombs, there to brood over the deep game he had played and to wonder when they would hang the person who had taken the life of poor Madeline Miggs.

"I guess I can go back now," said a man who stood in a small room with woods in sight from the window that overlooked a sloping roof. "I guess they don't want Epsom Tibbets to remain away any longer. The Wonder-Sharp knows where I am and so does Gilbert Haskins who has cleared his character, and who didn't take the diamonds nor kill Madeline Miggs."

And he came back to the city; he returned to the scene of his former exploits, and about the first thing he read after returning was an account of the confession and death of—Lura, the Leopard Queen.

"I thought so!" said Tibbets. "She always was a determined creature. Had eyes that meant business. I more than half suspected her, but said nothing. It's best for one to keep mum

sometimes. Well, I won't be dragged into court. Glad of that. Guess I'll open at the same old stand. Miggs won't die there again. She can't, you know. Impossible!"

Yes, he came back to work again his game of fleecing people who seem born to be fleeced; but this time he did not prosper. Although he made up with his wife, Maggie, he was under a cloud, and the death of Madeline Miggs in his den drove him off—let us hope to a place where he never got rich playing usurer.

Olive Haskins, of course, came back to her home.

The meshes of the web which had nearly destroyed a father had been broken by the cunning and coolness of the greatest of spotters; the death of her mother had been avenged by the ferreting out of the hand that committed the deed, and Captain Tunis, as the trainer and accomplice of the Leopard Queen, was behind doors that would not open to him for many years, if ever, until the grave demanded its own.

Gilbert Haskins, rehabilitated—though nothing could restore the lost eye, nor reform the shoulder—marks of the prison fire—became an inmate of his brother's house, and Olive, as Jack Parsons's wife, is happy to-day, and beyond reach of the fell designs and the soft gloved hands of Captain Tunis.

Simon Sulks sulked away, and never came back. He was not missed, and no one cared to look for him.

Little Clova has since grown into a splendid woman, and in course of time was married in Olive's house, being given away by Gilt-Edge Dan, the Detective, who stood as her sponsor and guardian.

Here ends the trail, and with a sincere wish that all trails may end as happily, we write the last word in the romance of the Mystery of Madeline Miggs.

THE END.

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